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A teller of tales: Narratology and the works of Sherwood Anderson

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A Teller of Tales: Narratology and the Works of Sherwood Anderson

(TITLE)

BY

Jamie Patton

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Abstract

The publication of *Winesburg, Ohio* in 1919 introduced Sherwood Anderson as an American author with great potential, but when critics attempted to evaluate Anderson's legacy following his death in 1941, most concluded that his career beyond that book and a few short stories failed to deliver on that promise to permanently establish Anderson as a writer with a lasting impact. However, Anderson's direct influence on key players of the modernist period, most notably Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner, suggests the need for scholars to take a closer look at his work in order to better understand his impact and the evolution of American literature during the modern period. This thesis analyzes the narrational choices found Anderson's most famous work as well as his texts *Poor White* (1921), *The Triumph of the Egg* (1922), and *Dark Laughter* (1925) in order to reveal the connection between Anderson's storytelling techniques and the story's theme. In each text, he tries a different narrative method, choosing the narrator's perspective and presence within the story that will best reflect what the characters are experiencing, which is usually some form of alienation or confusion in their attempts to build relationships with one another.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this project to my family and friends. Even though many of them will never actually read it, I want them to know that I could not have completed such a daunting task without their patience, support, and love.

Acknowledgments

First, I would like to thank my family for their constant support throughout my entire college career, but especially during these last few hectic months. Thanks for keeping me motivated and sane. I also want to express my utmost gratitude to my readers, Dr. Parley Ann Boswell and Dr. Marjorie Worthington, for all of their time spent engaging with my work and offering thoughtful feedback. Finally, I must thank Dr. Fern Kory for her tireless work in directing this thesis. This project would not have been possible without her guidance, insight, and patience.

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Introduction

In his review of Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* published in *Smart Set* magazine in August 1919, H.L. Mencken summarized the general state of interest and optimism surrounding the author's future when he announced:

> This Anderson is a man of whom a great deal will be heard hereafter. Along with Willa Cather, James Branch Cabell and a few others, he belongs to a small group that has somehow emancipated itself from the prevailing imitativeness and banality of the national letters and is moving steadily toward work that will do honor to the country. (257)

While many critics shared this expectation of greatness at the time, a mere six years later, Anderson was considered by many to be creatively tapped (Townsend 227). Most of his works following *Winesburg, Ohio* were poorly received by critics and audiences alike; however, Anderson was still considered a greatly influential author throughout his life based upon appreciation of the combination of realistic characters and lyrical prose in his early successes. Following Anderson's death in 1941, scholars attempting to sum up his legacy began to question his elevated status. The debate regarding Sherwood Anderson's place in literary history continued into the 1960s with many concluding that he had been over-praised. Anderson himself, despite his notoriously sensitive ego, did have the foresight to predict that he would be remembered as "but a minor figure" (Lewis White 16). In his 1950 reflection upon Anderson's career, Irving Howe agreed with the author's self-assessment, concluding that Anderson had produced a small canon of admirable work, but his talents had been greatly exaggerated by contemporaries including Gertrude Stein and William Faulkner. Howe acknowledged Anderson's critical focus on everyday

America and features of his own hometown as influential for young writers of the period such as Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway, but these younger men were credited with developing narrative structures that were far more effective than those of their predecessor. Even those who recognized the power of Anderson's influence and supported his position in the canon of American literature made note of his flaws. Malcolm Cowley begins his 1960 introduction to the Penguin edition of *Winesburg, Ohio* by admitting, "Rereading Sherwood Anderson after many years, one feels again that his work is desperately uneven, but one is gratified to find that the best of it is as new and springlike as ever" (1).

While Cowley recognizes the inconsistency of the quality of Anderson's work as noted by Howe and his fellow detractors, the introduction also emphasizes the impact of Anderson's early style on future writers including Hemingway, Faulkner, Wolfe, and Steinbeck. Anderson was involved with Hemingway and Faulkner directly, helping both men become published early in their careers. William L. Phillips' article "Sherwood Anderson's Two Prize Pupils" details the relationships between Anderson and each of these writers. As a young writer, Hemingway admired Anderson's portrayal of Middle American characters in simple language that still managed to capture the significance of seemingly insignificant events (203). Hemingway's first collection of short stories, published in 1923, even includes several works noted for their Anderson-ian features, especially the story "My Old Man" which shares noticeable thematic similarities and a similar narrative structure with Anderson's short story "I Want to Know Why." Faulkner responded to Anderson "as a writer dedicated to purity and 'exactitude' in his art but still capable of commanding a large popular audience" (Phillips 207-8).

Sherwood Anderson's particular impact on American literature is the result of these same features, most notably the focus on the in-depth look at middle class, Midwestern lives. He has been credited with causing a shift in the nation's fiction that placed attention on such settings and characters: "There are moments in American life to which he gave not only the first but the final expression" (Cowley 1). Anderson believed that his rejection of the typical plot-driven short story allowed his work to be both realistic and distinctly American: "...it was certain there were no plot short stories ever lived in any life I had known anything about" ("Form" 1293). Anderson also utilized slang to properly represent American speech.

While many accept Anderson's legacy as an influence for young writers of his era, the debate surrounding the lasting value of Anderson's individual works remained the dominant issue in Anderson scholarship throughout the 1960s and still persists as a point of contention for contemporary critics. Interest in and study of Anderson did expand in later years, and by the 1980s, scholars were also exploring the themes and techniques within the writer's work as opposed to arguing over its worth. Critics began studying similarities in style between Anderson and fellow writers such as Stein and James Joyce and discussing the author's depiction of social issues including socialism and industrialization. Even though the lenses for analyzing Anderson's writing became more numerous, the texts being discussed remained limited to *Winesburg, Ohio* and a handful of short stories. Jackson R. Bryer's *Sixteen Modern American Authors Volume 2: A Survey of Research and Criticism Since 1972* provides an overview of Anderson scholarship until 1990 that highlights the continued focus on that single work. Books and articles concentrating on *Winesburg, Ohio* have covered both the thematic aspects and the

authorial choices and devices employed by Anderson, but this kind of balanced attention has never been extended to the author's entire catalog. The arguments over Anderson's role in the canon often at least conceded that the genre of the short story was the most apt for his talents, and so his novels have been largely ignored by modern day critics. As Mencken's review predicted, Anderson has always enjoyed status as a definitively American writer, given his interest in typically Midwestern locales and attitudes. Although he has been admired for addressing the often-overlooked world of rural America, he has rarely been acknowledged for the specifics ways in which he addresses these issues. Anderson's failures in creating concise, focused narrative structures have always been noted by critics but few recent scholarly endeavors have explored these texts more in depth. In order to treat Sherwood Anderson's work with more careful attention and understand his specific gifts as a "teller of tales," the critical net must be cast further to encompass his entire career in hopes of identifying the consistencies and inconsistencies that define his legacy. I plan to examine this wider range of Anderson's texts through the lens of a narratological study, beginning at the common starting point of *Winesburg, Ohio*, as the text's significance in the author's career cannot be ignored and its early appearance in the chronology of Anderson's career serves as a useful reference point in plotting shifts in narrative technique over time. Then, progressing in order of publication, analysis of narrational choices in *Poor White* (1921), *The Triumph of the Egg* (1922), and *Dark Laughter* (1925) will reveal the connection between Anderson's storytelling techniques and the themes of loneliness and confusion that recur throughout his work.

The terms and interests of the study of narratology that emerged in literary studies during the 1980s offer a solid framework for analyzing Sherwood Anderson's authorial choices regarding storytelling and how these decisions affect theme and meaning. The introduction to Wallace Martin's *Recent Theories of Narrative* traces the progression of the fascination with narrative and reveals that critical study of the novel has historically faced limitations similar to those plaguing Anderson scholarship. Writing in the midst of the narratology wave in 1986, Martin reminds his readers of the lowly status of the novel in the world of criticism as recently as the 1940s. Thematic issues were frequently discussed by scholars, but the formal elements of the novel remained ignored (Martin 16). This pattern mimics the tendency in studies of Sherwood Anderson's work to focus on the repeated themes of loneliness and the rural Midwest while ignoring the patterns in the author's technique. The literary community following World War II saw a concentrated effort from critics such as Mark Schorer, Lawrence Bowling, and Joseph Frank to elevate discussion of the novel's formal features while others like Lionel Trilling argued that novelists concerning themselves with technique would detract from the realistic depiction of life that is the novel's most valuable feature (Martin 16-18). Those working to challenge the limitations placed discussion of narrative conventions and techniques included Wayne Booth whose 1961 book *The Rhetoric of Fiction* outlined the various choices available to authors for storytelling, especially in terms of narration and point of view, while also complicating the claims made by those on Trilling's side of the debate that authors must always be realistic and objective (Martin 22). After the 1960s, the number of narrative-based studies continued to rise as scholars explored elements such as a plot, time, and point of view within the novel. According to Gerald Prince's *A*

Dictionary of Narratology, Tzvetan Todorov coined the term in 1969 to describe the study of "the nature, form, and functioning of narrative" and relationship between the telling of the story and the story itself. Gerard Genette was partly responsible for bringing the field of narratology into vogue during the 1980s when he spelled out the numerous possible techniques for storytelling that play with the order of events, duration, and mood.

Although narratology has suffered a drastic decline in popularity and prevalence within literary studies since the early 1990s, the field's interest in the art and techniques of narration and the increased precision of terms that developed as a result make it well suited for studying Sherwood Anderson's work. Anderson's short stories and novels feature varied experiments with numerous narrational techniques which bring the storytelling process to the reader's attention and explicitly link the features of narrative with the thematic issues. In this work, I will define and explore the narrational elements found in various Anderson titles and analyze the impression that such choices are intended to leave upon the reader and consider what these choices—as a whole—tell us about what matters most to Anderson as a writer.

The first chapter, "Searching for a Narrator in *Winesburg, Ohio*," addresses the most widely read of the author's works. Although numerous books and articles have been devoted to discussing its themes and formal elements, little critical attention has been paid to the narrational shift that takes place between the preface chapter which introduces the concept of "the grotesque" as the book's central theme and the following stories that portray those grotesques. Focused attention to these features will set up

exploration of the relationship between the characters in the preface and those in the rest of the chapters and what the concept of "the grotesques" is supposed to mean to them.

Chapter Two covers two works that were composed simultaneously in 1918 but feature significant differences in terms of narration and point of view. This chapter will consider how a non-personified form of narration that shifts perspectives between focal characters better serves the novel *Poor White*, while a first-person, involved narrator is necessary for the short stories collected in *The Triumph of the Egg*. This analysis demonstrates Anderson's concern with depicting characters and their experiences as realistically as possible.

The final chapter is devoted to Anderson's only best seller and one of his few well-received novels, *Dark Laughter*, in order to illuminate changes in the author's stylistic choices in this narrative that became a turning point in Anderson's career. Published in 1925, the last of the texts being addressed here, *Dark Laughter* features the most experimentation on the author's part as he plays with popular modern narrational techniques such as stream-of-consciousness and embedding poetic verse into his prose. The critical failure and popular success of this more derivative experiment demonstrate a shift in American narrative that Anderson could imitate well enough for the masses. But he could not convince critics that he still belonged in the forefront of the national literary conversation. The concluding pages will attempt to synthesize the overall progression of Anderson's narratives in hopes of determining what these narrational choices reveal about the author's goals and how they relate to the eternal question surrounding Sherwood Anderson's position within the tradition of American letters. By identifying the alterations in his style and choices that Anderson makes apparent in his fiction

throughout the course of his career, readers can better understand the ideas that mattered most to Sherwood Anderson as a writer and how he was able to call attention to those concepts.

Chapter One

Searching for a Narrator in *Winesburg, Ohio*

The inclusion of *Winesburg, Ohio* in a study of Sherwood Anderson's career is rather inevitable. Since kick starting Anderson's career with its publication in 1919, this story cycle has received more critical attention than any other Anderson publication. As the single work that has stood the test of time and cemented Anderson's position in the American literary canon, a discussion of *Winesburg, Ohio* is necessary for understanding the patterns of Anderson's narrative technique. Throughout *Winesburg, Ohio*, Sherwood Anderson calls the reader's attention to aspects of narration, highlighting both its problems and possibilities for characters that rely on a narrator to tell stories that they themselves cannot properly express. Anderson leaves questions regarding the storyteller's identity unresolved and includes narration that announces its own inadequacy to bring narrative elements to the reader's attention in order to prove that narration and language are necessary for these characters while being difficult to control.

Questions surrounding the nature of the narration within *Winesburg, Ohio* first arise in the preface chapter entitled "The Book of the Grotesque." Anderson introduces the figures of the aging writer, confined to his bed, and a carpenter hired to construct a means to allow the bed-ridden man to better see out his window and observe the town below. These men seem to form a bond through the sharing of stories, the carpenter even breaking down into tears while relating tales about his career as a soldier. Given this emphasis on the personal storytelling aspect of this relationship, the reader might expect either the writer or the carpenter, who has begun to tell his own story, to be the narrator. However, Anderson rejects this expectation in favor of a mysterious third person who

shares the story. This introductory chapter establishes the theme of reliance upon an outsider as narrator, which repeats heavily throughout the book. Several critics have noted the desire expressed by both the author and the characters for an artist to take this role, but even these characters who express a need for a narrator have concerns about who will create meaning from their stories and how.

The carpenter divulges particulars of his own life to the understanding writer: "For a time the two men talked of the raising of the bed and then they talked of other things. The soldier [the carpenter] got on the subject of the war. The writer, in fact, led him to that subject" (*Winesburg* 3). The carpenter goes on to open up regarding his own brother's death in the Civil War. The writer is presented as a figure presumed to be particularly sensitive to ailments of the human condition due to his work creating fictional characters. In describing the writer, the narration explains, "And then, of course, he had known people, many people, known them in a peculiarly intimate way that was different from the way in which you and I know people. At least that is what the writer thought and the thought pleased him" (*Winesburg* 4). While the passage offers the concluding sentence as a disclaimer that the supposed enhanced perceptiveness of the writer is all in his mind, the fact remains that he presents himself as an understanding and insightful listener to his companion.

Although the chapter seems to be setting up the carpenter as a possible narrator for the rest of the book, relating the tales and insights about life that he hears from the writer, the character of the carpenter turns out to be relatively disposable. In fact, his brief presence is justified at the chapter's end with the explanation, "Concerning the old carpenter who fixed the bed for the writer, I only mentioned him because he, like many of

what are called very common people, became the nearest thing to what is understandable and lovable of the grotesques in the writer's book" (*Winesburg* 6). The narrator admits that the carpenter's experiences and thoughts are irrelevant to the story as a whole, and he is not meant to be fleshed out as a character. He merely stands in for the author's abstract conception of the common type of working-class people who are inclined to become grotesques by clinging to their singular truths. While this final sentence proves that the carpenter is rather inconsequential as an individual, it also perpetuates speculation about the identity of the narrator as distinct from the writer and calls attention to that figure's actions and purpose. The first-person pronoun in the passage establishes that there is an individual making deliberate decisions about what the reader learns, and that this is not a completely non-personified, faceless narrator. The reference to "the writer's book" and mentions of the aging author in the third person indicate that he is not the one making these choices either. The narrator makes other allusions to him or herself earlier in the chapter when, speaking of the writer's creation, he explains, "It was never published, but I saw it once and it made an indelible impression on my mind" (*Winesburg* 5). The character is obviously some kind of acquaintance of the writer's, but we receive no other information to determine their relationship.

Whatever the connection between the writer and the narrator of this chapter may be, the latter was obviously greatly influenced by the writer's theories. The single viewing of "The Book of the Grotesque" implanted itself in this figure's mind, causing him to reflect, "By remembering it I have been able to understand many people and things that I was never able to understand before" (*Winesburg* 5). The narrator goes on to explain the key concept of the writer's book which has apparently greatly influenced his

life: the grotesque. The idea is built around the assumption that there are certain defined truths: "There was the truth of virginity and the truth of passion, the truth of wealth and of poverty..." (*Winesburg* 5). The writer's book suggests that man should not restrict himself to just one such truth, as the narrator explains, "It was his notion that the moment one of the people took one of the truths to himself, called it his truth, and tried to live his life by it, he became a grotesque and the truth he embraced became a falsehood" (*Winesburg* 6). Thus, the carpenter and the characters who comprise the rest of the stories in *Winesburg* limit themselves by clinging to a single belief and never expand beyond that. As the narrator figure establishes the impact that this theory has had on his own life, he and the character of the aging writer are portrayed as part of a cyclical relationship. The writer first acted as a kind of storyteller for the people that he had encountered in life when he wrote about them in his book. The narrator then read that text and gained greater insight for understanding people and the mysterious "things" that live inside them—a knowledge set that he then uses to tell the story of the writer. The fact that first-person narration of personal experiences is never utilized and that the established writer who is supposedly well-versed in the art of creating understanding of the lives of others now needs the narrator to explain his story shows the reliance upon an outside figure to make meaning from those elusive "things."

In fact, there is even a shift in the narration between the preface and the rest of the book. The "I" who explained the significance of the old writer's theory of the grotesque and the need for a character like the carpenter disappears at the conclusion of the first chapter. The remaining stories are narrated by a nameless, faceless third party who makes no references to imply that he or she has personal connections to the people of

Winesburg. The change to this omniscient narrational style immediately raises questions about how the writer and the narrator from "The Book of the Grotesque" chapter relate to the book as a whole. Are these the stories straight from the old writer's book, or are they still being mediated by the previous narrator somehow? Why was there such emphasis on the personal relationship between the writer and the grotesques in the preface when that dynamic never comes up again in the remaining chapters? The implication is that the whole of *Winesburg, Ohio* is taken from the writer's book, but the question surrounding the identity of the narrator remains.

Anderson surrounds the storytelling process with further intrigue by creating a definite shift in narrational voice from that opening chapter to the rest of the novel. "The Book of the Grotesques" introduction establishes a frame for the rest of the book by creating the situation in which these stories have been recorded and are now being shared. In order to define the use of frames in literary structure, Brian Richardson's overview on the technique in *Narrative Dynamics* explains, "The frame can be anything that acts as a sign of a qualitative difference, a sign of the boundary between a marked and unmarked space" (Richardson 333). The change in the narrational voice and perspective between these two identified sections of *Winesburg* certainly establishes a difference. The narrator of the preface sets the stage for the subsequent chapters, but he is clearly no longer the one relating the tales. The body of the novel is told by a narrator most likely created by the aging old writer from the preface; this is his "Book of the Grotesque" as it was written. Ultimately, Anderson ends up embedding the tales of the characters from Winesburg into the narrative established in the preface. Theorist Gerard Genette has

been lauded by narratologists for developing terms and systems for analyzing embedded narratives and organizing the levels of discourse at work in such layered texts:

> Genette outlined a basic approach to narrative levels that identifies discrete narrative levels: when a figure within a narrative (first degree) begins to tell a story, the narrative level shifts (second degree). If a character in this inner narrative then tells another story, we have an additional level (third degree). These concepts are much simpler than Genette's terminology might suggest (respectively, extradiegetic, intradiegetic, metadiegetic, meta-metadiegetic,etc). (Richardson 329)

Winesburg, Ohio definitely includes transitions between varying narrative levels, but Anderson's prose does not outline the move from the first to second degree with the same clarity that can be found in other models of embedded narrative. William Nelles's chapter on "Stories within Stories" details the layers of narrative within the text of *The Thousand and One Nights* as an example of the method. This book begins with narration describing the lives of a sultan and his wife before the wife eventually begins narrating her own stories for her husband's entertainment as well as a means to save her own life. This text clearly identifies both that the wife is the new narrator and when she begins telling the embedded tales. In addition to leaving the narrator of the preface steeped in mystery, Anderson also refuses to offer any indication of who is telling the story for the rest of the novel. The demarcation between the first narrative and the second remains blurred by shifting immediately from one to the other; the frame seems to blend into the framed narrative without so much as an explanation of where exactly the new story is coming from. The different narrational voices in the two sections do allow for speculation regarding the relationship between the old writer and the "grotesques." The

narrator character in the preface allows for the observation of the old writer and the explanation of his ideas. The divide between the two parts of the book create the possibility that the character of George Willard, the young reporter at the *Winesburg Eagle* who becomes a sounding board and companion for many of the grotesques, is meant to stand in for the old writer or perhaps represent a boy who could become like the old writer.

In addition to the uncertainty surrounding who is telling the story, the preface also creates conflict surrounding how well this figure can relate the story. The limited access which the narrator of the preface has had to the old writer's "Book of the Grotesque" raises suspicions about the accuracy with which this figure can adequately sum up the theory of the grotesques and relate the old man's condition. If he only "saw it once" and is recollecting based solely on that memory, how can a reader be sure that this narrator fully understands the concept of the single truth? Furthermore, how does he know enough about the aging writer to know that this man feels a "young indescribable thing" within himself (*Winesburg* 4)? The narrator's reliability becomes questionable once these factors are revealed. However, in this situation, the commonly used label of the "unreliable narrator" could create the wrong impression regarding the narrator as a character. Unreliable narrator can often be classified by distortion of the truth (or, at least, what counts as truth within the world of the narrative) to save face or present the image that the narrating character wants the reader to believe. However, there are those narrators who genuinely misinterpret other characters' actions or make incorrect assumptions in their own minds. In his analysis of point of view and the difference between narration and focalization, or what he calls filtration, narratologist Seymour

Chatman provides more accurate terminology to describe the motivations behind "unreliable" narration:

> We must distinguish between two kinds of "untrustworthiness." In the first, the *narrator's* account of the events (including what any character says or thinks) seems at odds with what the text implies to be the facts. That is what is generally meant by "unreliable narration." In the second, the *character's* perceptions and conceptions of the story events, the traits of the other characters, and so on, seem at odds with what the narrator is telling or showing. I propose that we call the latter effect *fallible filtration.* (Chatman 149)

Chatman restricts the label of "fallible" to the filter characters through whose eyes the narrator focuses the storytelling by offering that characters thoughts and opinions. However, this definition insists that there is still a narrator who can provide an accurate version of the story and call attention to the inaccuracies in the filter's perceptions. The narrator from the opening chapter of *Winesburg, Ohio*, though, falls into his own category of a fallible narrator. He is not an unreliable narrator in the sense that Chatman's definition suggests; there is not necessarily disagreement between the facts of the story and his telling of it. The term "unreliable" suggests that elements have been excluded on purpose, but the narration in the preface is not so much calculated in its untrustworthiness as it is the result of the narrator's limited access to his subject. The narrator obviously wants to relate the aging writer's tale and explain his theory of the grotesque because he feels that it has enhanced his own life, but the circumstances under which this figure has learned these details suggests the possibility of inaccuracy.

Although it would have been expected for either the aging writer or the carpenter to narrate the introduction and subsequent chapters from his own perspective, the use of an outsider to assign meaning to the relationship establishes a pattern that repeats itself heavily throughout Anderson's novel. The inhabitants of *Winesburg, Ohio* are often described as needing an outside figure who can articulate their exact feelings and adequately describe their experiences. In order to capture this need for assistance with expression, Anderson relies repeatedly on vagueness and abstract terms when describing character' feelings and motivations. This practice can be found in the introductory chapter where the writer is said to have a "young indescribable thing within himself," referring to his memories of the lives that he has observed—the real ones that then inspired the fictional beings in his book. The writer is kept awake by thoughts of these people: "He imagined the young indescribable thing within himself was driving a long procession of figures before his eyes…They were all grotesques. All of the men and women the writer had ever known had become grotesques (*Winesburg* 4-5).

John Updike calls attention to the frequent use of abstraction within Anderson's description of thoughts and feelings in his introduction to the *Modern Library Classics* edition of *Winesburg*, explaining, "The vagueness of 'the thing' is chronic, and only the stumbling, shrugging, willful style that Anderson made of [Gertrude] Stein's serene run-on syntax affords him half a purchase on his unutterable subject, the 'thing' troubling the heart of his characters" (xviii). The indescribable feelings that drive Anderson's characters are handled in such a way that the vagueness of their description does not read as a failure on the author's part, but rather as an indication of the character's confusion

and loneliness. These are people who need someone else to make some sense of their emotions, but, often, there simply are no words to adequately express those feelings.

Susan Lohafer's article "A Cognitive Approach to Storyness" describes this reliance on the vague as typical of the nature of the short story itself, especially those of Anderson's contemporaries. At first, Lohafer describes the genre as the most practical form of literature, particularly for school teachers in need of a text that can be quickly consumed by students and still provide numerous opportunities for learning. While she classifies the short story as a "useful" format, she goes on to add, "On the other hand, they are strangely indescribable. In short story criticism, there is also a tradition of ineffability, of failing to say what stories are" (Lohafer 301). It seems appropriate that the short story genre is described as being misunderstood and hard to nail down when an underappreciated author such as Sherwood Anderson is considered a master of the field. Although *Winesburg* is technically considered a novel, the structure of the story cycle obviously plays to the author's strengths in working with shorter pieces. In the case of Anderson and his fellow short story authors of the "Modern" period, the intangible aspect of the genre itself works its way into the language of the text. Lohafer studies the make-up of the short story, particularly closure and the types of sentences that signal the conclusion of a work's "storyness." Her research of various samples identifies common patterns of three different eras—Early, Modern, and Contemporary:

> What would we expect of "Modern" stories? Thinking of Hemingway, we would look for the highest incidence of "thing"-related keywords. Interestingly enough, when coding keywords in this period, I found myself often torn between the categories "thing" and "idea." References to "things," pure and simple, occurred

> least often in the "Modern" period (11:4:12); however, references to things-as-ideas occurred most often there (4:17:8). (Lohafer 306)

The author goes on to cite an example of such usage from Anderson's short story "I Want to Know Why." Although Lohafer singles out Hemingway as her representative for the Modern period, her passage from Anderson and the fact that, chronologically, his work precedes the other author's establishes his significance in pioneering the use of vagueness for describing complex ideas.

Lohafer's research shows that various writers of Anderson's era employed the notion of the "thing" to refer to complex thought, but Sherwood Anderson stands apart from authors like Hemingway, with his iceberg theory utilizing sparse language and limited detail, by calling attention to the ineffable nature of the "thing" and pointing out the need for a figure who is expected to better explain such abstract ideas. The chapter of *Winesburg* entitled "Hands" concerns the character of Wing Biddlebaum, a former school teacher who prefers a life of solitude in the Ohio town after a misunderstanding regarding his relationship with his students led to scandal and loss of his job. The story's title refers to the means through which Biddlebaum raises parents' suspicions ("Keep your hands to yourself!") and the part of him that seems to be most in need of expression. The narrating voice announces, "Let us look briefly into the story of the hands. Perhaps our talking of them will arouse the poet who will tell the hidden wonder story of the influence for which the hands were but fluttering pennants of promise" (*Winesburg* 12). This passage features two different ways that Anderson uniquely goes about telling a story. For one, much like in the preface chapter when the narrator explained the reasoning for the inclusion of the carpenter character, the speaker here has specific reasons for focusing

the tale specifically on the hands. The implicit choices that comprise storytelling are brought to the foreground for readers to notice and think about.

Not only does the narration raise consciousness about *what* is told in the story, but it also raises questions about *who* is telling the story and the effectiveness of that figure. There is already a narrator inviting "us" to consider the story of the hands, and yet, he still hopes that "the poet" will emerge to provide greater analysis and insight. A few paragraphs later, we get an example of the exact style of narration that is in need of revision by the poet: "In their feeling for the boys under their charge such men are not unlike the finer sort of women in their love of men. And yet that is but crudely stated. It needs the poet there" (*Winesburg* 12-13). Anderson wards off any criticism of his descriptive skills by lodging the first complaint about them. However, it is not just the inadequacy of his words that the author identifies, but the failures of any common discourse attempting to detail the meaning of human life. The narration suggests its own failings by implying that there are aspects of the story that even it cannot express. The narration never explains how a poet would enhance the storytelling process, but the implication is that a more poetic style would better reflect the complicated inner-workings of the characters. Although future critics of Sherwood Anderson's work such as Irving Howe and Benjamin Spencer would focus on Anderson's disinterest with the "literary and philosophical past of Europe" that creators of "high-art" of his time were expected to know about and respond to, the author's play with language and its abilities suggests an attitude similar to the theories of a critical approach that would emerge long after his career: post-structuralism. Catharina Wulf's study of post-structuralist theory in the book *The Imperative of Narration: Beckett, Bernhard, Schopenhauer, Lacan* provides

an overview for the argument criticizing the effectiveness of language: "In Wulf's Lacanian terms, desire as language and narration can never reach its fulfillment or end. As Beckett's Unnamable knows only too well, language and narration are not of the self, and therefore cannot appease its particular longings" (Gibson 1179). Since language is a learned system rather than a natural function, there are bound to be gaps in regards to what language can adequately express: "Hence narration presses relentlessly on towards a goal that is definitively lost from the start" (Gibson 1179). Of Lacan's approach to literary narration, Robert Con Davis summarizes as follows:

> It says simply that narration, too, operates like a language, is a language, and manifests linguistic operations in various ways. Narration exists, finally, within the context of an unconscious "discourse" within the bounds of what Lacan calls the "discourse of the Other." (Con Davis 848)

The self-aware and self-deprecating nature of Anderson's narration reflects such elements by showing the narrator questioning his own choices and abilities. The speaker second-guesses himself by requesting the aid of the poet to provide proper commentary and interpretation. Anderson also appears skeptical of the usefulness of narration based on his call for a poet to supplement the insufficient explanations of thoughts and experiences. However, unlike the post-structuralists, the author still has faith in language itself; he simply favors a more poetic form for describing the human experience.

While the commentary provided by the narrator about the failings of his own narration calls attention to the inadequacies of all forms of narration, this level of discourse and reflection on the storytelling process does not occur again outside of "Hands." The progression from the personified narrator in the preface to the self-

conscious voice in "Hands" to the relatively detached personality found in the rest of the book mirrors a pattern found in literary history. Chatman traces the changing attitudes towards the non-personified narrator over time within the field of narratology. He explains the long history of the characterized narrator, a figure who actually takes part in the action and is described in human terms, and how this type of narrator was the expected norm in literature for many years. Chatman then identifies a historical moment when this tradition began to fade:

> But in the twentieth century, fictions began to minimize their discourse, and the "voice" of the narrator grew fainter. To describe the art of such writers as Hemingway (in "The Killers," for example), many critics invoked a narrator who was not a speaker but a visual recorder, a mere "camera-eye." Some narratologists—I include myself— even claimed that the narrator had disappeared, that certain literary narratives were simply "non-narrated." (115)

The transition between narrational styles that takes place within Anderson's work between the preface and the bulk of the book reflects the same type of shift that was taking place in narratives as a whole at the time. As Chatman explains of himself and his fellow narratologists, the storytelling technique found in the bulk of *Winesburg, Ohio* was not referred to as "narration" because the unidentified, outside figure who relates the story was not considered a "narrator" in the traditional sense. The commentary in the form of the request for the poet found in "Hands" is closer to the preferred form of narration in which the storyteller is injecting personal opinion and evaluation into the text. Chatman, however, eventually denounces his own former argument that "narration" can only come from a human figure, a realization that he arrived at through the development

of film criticism and the ways in which cinema relies on the creative decisions being made by an external narrator like the director. "Camera-eye" became a popular analogy for non-personified narration in the Modern period, no doubt as a result of the development of cinema in the early 20th century and refinement of narrative structure in film. In the chapters following "Hands," Anderson removes the voice of the narrator and his commentary in favor of a more filmic approach which focalizes the story through the thoughts of personified characters. The perspective shifts from one to another, almost like a camera panning from one actor to another. Although the narrator's own opinions are no longer couched in personal pronouns and references to his own work as the storyteller, this figure, like the film director, is still present to aim the focus of the story and assign meaning even when his presence is not pronounced.

Scholar Edwin Fussell first responded to the reliance on an artist figure like the poet to create meaning from the seemingly empty lives of the townspeople in his article "*Winesburg, Ohio:* Art and Isolation." Fussell works to contradict common readings that focus full attention on the grotesques of the town and instead argues that the development of the character of George Willard—the developing artist—must be attended to with equal consideration. Referring to the tendency to fixate on the single truths of the grotesque, Fussell argues, "To do so is at a stroke to give up half the book; worse than that, to give up the half which furnishes perspective and therefore significance to the other" (107). The article identifies George Willard as the artistic figure who can validate the experiences of Winesburg's citizens with his ambitions of becoming a writer. Fussell essentially implies that the townspeople are dependent upon George, who can carry on their stories and find some kind of significance or moral in them to ensure that their lives

have not been completely meaningless. As much as the grotesques seem to depend upon George Willard, Fussell is quick to point out that many of them feel that they are providing the young man with something in return: "Their understanding is inevitably not the same as his, which is one of the general truths *Winesburg* readily enforces; but another is that without their gifts there would be no writer at all" (108). Wing Biddlebaum is described as relying on George and only coming out of his self-imposed seclusion when accomplished by the boy. George is his only remaining connection to human life: "Although he still hungered for the presence of the boy, who was the medium through which he expressed his love of man, the hunger became again a part of his loneliness and his waiting" (*Winesburg* 15). Despite this strong sense of reliance on the young man, Wing is often portrayed attempting to impart some piece of wisdom about life onto George. He seems to believe that his own failures in relationships can serve as lessons from which the boy must learn and grown. The article implies that this is merely a misperception on the part of Wing Biddlebaum and the lonely townspeople, hoping that they can make an impact on another person, especially someone suspected to have a promising future. The ultimate power, in Fussell's opinion, is still in George's hands as a writer.

Critic David Stouck responds to Fussell's piece in "*Winesburg, Ohio* and the Failure of Art" by identifying contradictions within the original article's discussion of the differences between the artist and the grotesque. Stouck questions Fussell's assumption that George Willard can redeem the townspeople by giving their experiences meaning if the artist is the only one capable of self-reflection. As Stouck explains, Fussell claims

that grotesques will be aided by George's artistic endeavors, but there is a problem with this logic:

> (...) he asserts at the same time that the awareness of isolation as the universal human condition comes only to the artist. Without the extension of this awareness, then, to the townspeople of Winesburg, the artist's sympathy remains ineffectual, since awareness and any ensuing "release" are limited to himself. (Stouck 146)

Stouck's article insists that George is the only one who can benefit from his art; the characters that he encounters and supposedly validates cannot actually gain any greater understanding of the significance of their own lives from the artist's observation and interpretation of what he sees. While Stouck's argument that the people of Winesburg do not develop direct awareness from the artist's efforts is correct, the grotesques from the novel do not read as particularly interested in the writer George Willard feeding his insight about their lives back to them. They seem to feel that their lives will merely be validated by an artist carrying their stories out into the world beyond Winesburg and perhaps re-telling them to others. The chapter entitled "The Philosopher" features Doctor Parcival, a relatively new member of the community, seeking out George Willard's company in order to tell the young man his stories. The doctor does not claim to have any expectations of their meetings: "What I want to talk to you of the matter I don't know. I might keep still and get more credit in your eyes. I have a desire to make you admire me, that's a fact. I don't know why. That's why I talk. It's very amusing, eh?" (*Winesburg* 32). The men meet several times over the course of a month, and Doctor Parcival tells personal stories which George has difficulty determining if they are true. Eventually George finds out that the doctor moved to Winesburg five years prior in order

to write a book. The climax of the chapter comes when a buggy accident occurs and a small child dies, but Doctor Parcival refused to go to the scene. None of the townspeople seem to care about his decision, but the doctor believes that the community will soon turn against him. His paranoia leads him to seek out George Willard to pass along his one request: "If something happens perhaps you will be able to write the book that I may never get written" (*Winesburg* 39). Doctor Parcival had been passing along his stories and ideas to George as a back-up system to make sure that, one day, his thoughts will be published for all to see.

Despite his disagreement with Fussell's larger argument, Stouck does appear to support the other scholar's insistence that George Willard must be considered as a key player within any reading of *Winesburg* and not be overshadowed by the theme of the grotesques. In fact, he sees the focus on Willard found in Fussell's reading as a crucial point in criticism surrounding the novel:

> The most significant achievement of recent criticism has been to establish George Willard as the "central consciousness," so that we view the book as a whole as recording an artist's growth towards maturity. This reading urges that we identify George Willard with the narrator, both of which may be seen as *personae* of Sherwood Anderson himself. (Stouck 146)

Although the direct narration of the novel does not suggest that the story is being told from George's point of view, he is the character who is being directly affected by the numerous stories. Fussell's observation about the townspeople believing that they are the ones giving something to George Willard reminds readers that the young man, for better or worse, is being shaped by his interactions with the grotesques. He, though, is afforded

the luxury to possess more than the single truths that represent the small-town residents; the artist encompasses more ideas and contradictions. The characters who share their stories with the young man view him as a kind of metaphorical narrator for their own lives—one who will spread their tales and provide the proper framework in which these experiences can offer greater understanding of life. Both Doctor Parcival and Mrs. Willard express a desire for George to continue their legacies by sharing stories or parts of themselves that they were never able to share. In the case of Wing Biddlebaum, the focus on the nervous energy of his hands implies that they are meant to be his mode of expression, making clenched fists when he is angry and offering soft caresses to those he cares for. However, the failure on the part of the hands to communicate Wing's true intentions makes them ineffectual and results in the need for an interpreter like George Willard.

While the citizens of Winesburg need George Willard to assume the role of the narrator, the other who can give meaning to their lives, they are also portrayed as suspicious of his travels beyond Ohio and the possibility of too much success on his part. The character who appears most conflicted about George's future is his own mother. Although the two rarely speak directly, Mrs. Willard feels an unspoken bond between her and her son and believes that any achievement on his part will be a success for the both of them. Thus, she takes his future so seriously that she offers this determined prayer while she observes his bedroom:

> "If I am dead and see him becoming a meaningless drab figure like myself, I will come back [...] I will take any blow that may befall if but this my boy be allowed to express something for us both." Pausing uncertainly, the woman stared about

> the boy's room. "And do not let him become smart and successful either," she added vaguely. (*Winesburg* 23)

As Fussell's article suggests, Elizabeth Willard hopes that her son's artistic endeavors will represent both of their experiences and ideas, especially since she sees the two of them as specially connected. She admits to her own life being "drab" and her only validation will come from her son's accomplishments. However, her concluding line displays her underlying fear of also losing her son to the life of the artist in the city. She does not want him to become "meaningless," but she also wants him to avoid qualities such as intelligence and achievement that many would equate with living a significant, meaningful life. Mrs. Willard's notion of success seems to be the opposite of the type of achievement that her husband wants for young George. Mrs. Willard sees the act of expression itself as the reward rather than anything that can be measured in monetary value. Tom Willard wants his son to be changed by money and power, to become more outspoken and less "like a gawky girl" (*Winesburg* 26). George's mother, on the other hand, dreads that such a transformation will take place. The self-assuredness that Mr. Willard wishes to see in his son would be the result of the smartness or awareness of his own intelligence that Mrs. Willard prayed would not plague young George. She views his introverted nature as the very thing that gives him his artistic flair and it also happens to be one of the elements that connects them. What Tom Willard views as deplorable feminine characteristics in George, Elizabeth sees as a sensitivity that sustains the mother-son bond. Regarding Mrs. Willard's thoughts on her son's personality, the narration explains, "'He is groping about, trying to find himself,' she though. 'He is not a dull clod, all words and smartness. Within him there is a secret something that is striving

to grow. It is the thing I let be killed in myself'" (*Winesburg* 25). The mother seems to recognize the process of meaning-making which her son is going through; although, Edwin Fussell and David Stouck may have argued that the woman could not possibly understand such a task since it requires a mode of understanding only accessible to the artist. In fact, Mrs. Willard values the process of finding meaning more than the actual answers that come from that process. Her disdain for "smartness" coincides with her previous concerns about the possibilities of her son's future success. The outspoken man that her husband wants George to become would certainly be all words and confidence, but Elizabeth prefers her son to be observant in searching for answers rather than assuming that he already has them. Although the beginning of the passage reflects observations about her son, the final line of the passage reveals that Mrs. Willard is still operating from the mindset of the grotesque and her own life experience. Her singular truth regarding the life and freedom that she feels she lost are guiding her understanding of what her son is going through. As a result of her own experiences, she worries that George will be changed by the influences of his father, the man whom Elizabeth blames for stripping her of her own expressive potential.

Mrs. Willard's suspicions surrounding artistic success reflect a common distrust aimed towards the idea of high-art, one that Sherwood Anderson himself was accused of holding:

> Anderson seemed the archetype of all those writers who were trying to raise themselves to art by sheer emotion and sheer will, who suspected intellect as a cosmopolitan snare that would destroy their gift for divining America's mystic

> essence, and who abominated their society but knew no counterpoise of value by which to escape its moral dominion. (Howe 196)

Irving Howe's evaluation of Anderson coincides with similar critiques made by his contemporaries during a period of re-examination of the author's status in the literary canon roughly ten years after his death. During his years of productivity, the majority of Anderson's work was well-received and his name was often cited amongst the most influential of the Modern period. However, from the late 1940s through the 1960s, critics began to re-evaluate the author's talent and argued that his impact had been vastly over exaggerated by those who were commeting on individual works, such as *Winesburg, Ohio*, as they were published. Later critics were able to review Anderson's work in its entirety and concluded that gems like *Winesburg* and a few short stories were the stellar exceptions in the career of "a minor literary figure," a label that Anderson himself coined and predicted would define his legacy. Lionel Trilling agrees with Howe's observations regarding Anderson's rejection of artistic history, particularly the influence of the European tradition, arguing, "Of what is implied by these things Anderson's books have no hint and he seems to have had no notion. His awareness of the past was limited, perhaps by his fighting faith in the 'modern,' and this, in a modern, is always a danger" (300). The author's focus on American characters and experiences from his own time is perceived by critics as a flaw; the fact that he cannot or will not draw from knowledge of literary tradition confirms Anderson's status as a writer of restricted power. Elizabeth Willard's language from previous passages is particularly telling in supporting the claim that Anderson held a certain contempt for intellectuals. Her assertion that her son is not a "dull clod" because he is not "all words and smartness" implies that those who do contain

such knowledge are. This can even be read as a justification of the linguistic vagueness found throughout Anderson's work; to have all the words would be dull and presumptuous in Mrs. Willard's eyes. The same distaste for the intellectual appears later in the novel in the description of a college instructor who is an intended who is an intended suitor for Helen White, who also happens to be the object of George Willard's affections. The instructor is introduced with the explanation, "Although he had also been raised in an Ohio town, the instructor began to put on airs of the city. He wanted to appear cosmopolitan" (*Winesburg* 223). The description ignores the fact that this man is a legitimate scholar and well-educated, instead suggesting that he is merely assuming the appearance of sophistication. The implication is that real Ohio "folk," educated or not, do not talk in such a manner. Not surprisingly, the girl favors George Willard over the "pompous" instructor, convinced that the educated man "would not do for her purpose" of creating the type of romantic relationship that she desires (*Winesburg* 220). She does note the advantage of entertaining such a man for appearances sake; she knows that she can impress the townspeople with the type of man that she was able to attract while away at college. However, once again, intellectualism is only useful for appearances. When it comes to a substantial, human connection, Helen seeks out small-town George Willard. He seems to represent the best of both worlds—a potential future in the artistic world of the city tempered by the grounding nature of a lifetime in Winesburg.

The final chapter entitled "Departure" offers the most insight into what George Willard will ultimately take from this town and what he will make of the grotesques to which he has been exposed. In fact, it is not until the final pages that Anderson provides hints as to who the young writer will become. As he sits aboard the train waiting to

depart, George discreetly counts hi money based on his father's advice to not appear naïve. This detail could set off warning signals that the young man is in danger of abandoning those qualities that his mother loved in favor of the appearance of masculine confidence that has been suggested by his father. George is described as fixated on his father's advice to focus his attention on his money, especially when he gets to the city. However, the young man quickly abandons this train of thought and moves on to think about the eccentric townspeople that he has encountered throughout the book. The narration makes note of the fact that he focuses on such "little things" rather than the events changing his own life before the novel concludes with the final paragraph:

> The young man's mind was carried away by his growing passion for dreams. One looking at him would not have thought him particularly sharp. With the recollection of little things occupying his mind he closed his eyes and leaned back in the car seat. He stayed that way for a long time and when he aroused himself and again looked out of the car window the town of Winesburg had disappeared and his life there had become but a background on which to pain his manhood. (*Winesburg* 231)

At first glance, this conclusion seems to imply that the characters of Winesburg are being forgotten completely as George's future comes into sharper focus. The lessons that the grotesques were determined to teach him, though, can be seen in his final passage. His mother, in particular, would be pleased to see the young man abandon his father's advice about material possessions and focus instead on dreams for the future. The implication that he does not appear "sharp" while lost in his imagination would suit Mrs. Willard and Helen White just fine in their distaste for the overly intellectual. George does not give

off the appearance of intelligence, but he is engaged in a contemplation of abstract thoughts and the small-town experiences that have shaped him. His concern with the "little *things*" also establishes the impact that the people of Winesburg have had on him. Although these influences are supposedly about to be painted over by George's own experiences, the tales from the grotesques are still going to be carried out from the town and live on in this aspiring artist. If his thoughts about the "little things" before the train departs are any indication, the background will continue to shine through and be a focal point in the portrait of George Willard's future.

Chapter 2

Reliability and Fallibility in *Poor White* and *The Triumph of the Egg*

Although Sherwood Anderson would never release another text to surpass *Winesburg, Ohio* in terms of critical acclaim and longevity as a part of the canon of American literature, he continued to produce literature that would be appreciated commercially and critically in its own time. Anderson began composition of his two follow-ups to *Winesburg* simultaneously in 1918 (Townsend 157). One, *The Triumph of the Egg*, was a collection of short-stories without the frame and connected structure found in *Winesburg, Ohio* and the other, *Poor White*, a traditionally formatted novel. *Poor White* was the first to reach publication in October 1920, touted as "the novel that was to bring the people of Winesburg into the modern age" with its themes concerned with industrialization in another small Ohio town (*American* 24).

Although the critical response to the novel at the time of its release was varied and sales were less than stellar, *Poor White* has since been hailed by critics, from Irving Howe in 1951 (200) to David D. Anderson in 1962 (247), as one of the author's best works and, certainly, his best novel. The mixed reviews from Anderson's contemporaries did not stop him from being clumped amongst "the rising authors of the day"; the release of *Poor White* coincided with that of Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* (Townsend 171). *The Triumph of the Egg* was released a year later in 1921 to critical acclaim in the form of the first award for excellence bestowed by prestigious literary journal *The Dial* as well as a ringing endorsement from influential British modernist Rebecca West, whose review classified the collection as containing some of the best stories of the century.

While these works are not as widely read or discussed today as *Winesburg, Ohio* or sections from it, namely the most commonly anthologized story "Hands," both the novel and the short-story collection reflect Anderson's continued struggles with narrative; here he explores further experimentation with focalization and a style of first-person narration that calls attention to the storytelling process. In *Poor White*, Anderson expands upon his previous uses of focalization by making the transitions between focal characters more frequent, allowing the reader to see multiple perspectives of a single event or interaction in a short period of time. The author employs this style in the novel in order to show how much dysfunction and alienation can exist between members of a seemingly close-knit community and between a couple in a fledgling marriage. In *The Triumph of the Egg*, the author returns to some of the techniques found in *Winesburg, Ohio*, specifically the use of narrator commentary about the storytelling process, in order to reflect the first-person narrator's confusion over an experience that he wants to better understand. Anderson changes narrational techniques between texts in order for the style of storytelling in a given work to reflect the theme of the story as a whole, and the themes in the Anderson's books often center on miscommunication or misunderstandings between people that would benefit from a narrator's insight into their thoughts. The characters of Hugh McVey and Clara Butterworth are often at odds with one another, but access to what the other individual is thinking would reveal that they often desire similar things.

Rideout's description of *Poor White* as focused on effects of modernization of a town like Winesburg exaggerates the connection between these texts, but it does call attention to the similar themes and elements at work in both texts. The setting and

characters are not the same, but the way that Anderson populates a new town with interconnected lives and stories certainly harkens back to elements of the first book. Bidwell, Ohio is a rural community that experiences an influx of industrialized labor as a result of factories and new inventions intended to simplify men's work, but the workers and eventually the inventor see industrialization as diminishing the value of manual labor. In addition to the focus on the pitfalls of modernization for the small town as a community, the novel also portrays the conflict that the process creates between individual people of the town. Rideout summarizes *Poor White's* purpose:

> (...) partly a symbolic history of American development as a whole, partly a psychological exploration of the attempts by a man and a woman to break through the wall of alienation which, according to Anderson, surrounds each individual, and partly a lesson in attaining a warm human relationship. (*American* 24)

In order to fully capture that alienation and show perspectives from both sides of the "wall of alienation," Anderson's novel *Poor White* employs a non-personified narrator and regularly focalizes the action through one of the numerous characters who inhabit the town of Bidwell, providing insight into the internal processes and emotions of several different characters. This access to more than just spoken words and physical actions highlights the very elements of narration that make the most commonly used terminology for describing narrational perspective inadequate and in need of improvement. As narratologist Seymour Chatman pointed out in 1990, "We 'see' not only physical objects but memories, abstract ideas, relationships, and so on: hence the complexity and vagueness of the term 'point of view'" (Chatman 139). The narration in *Poor White* provides access to all of these invisible and intangible aspects of several different

characters. In fact, the narration switches the lens of focalization often, sometimes within a single page or paragraph. A scene describing a walk shared between Hugh McVey and Clara Butterworth deftly maneuvers the reader from one mind to another. The narration begins by revealing the thoughts occupying Hugh's head before quickly transitioning:

> When he and Clara got out of town into a country road, he began thinking of Sarah Shepard...Had Clara taken it into her head to scold as Sarah Shepard had done he would have been relieved.
>
> Instead Clara walked in silence, thinking of her own affairs and planning to use Hugh for her own ends. (*Poor* 259)

The access that the narration in *Poor White* provides to the perspectives of numerous characters proves the point regarding narrational "omniscience" suggested by Wayne Booth back in 1961; the choice for authors and the focus for scholars should not be omniscience or not, but rather the degree of omniscience based on what needs to be revealed and how (164). In order to represent the alienation that Anderson views as existing between human beings, a multiplicity of distinct perspectives is necessary.

The constant changes in focalization are how the narration, and by extension Anderson, reflects the disconnect that exists between the characters of Hugh and Clara; this alienation is what the author believes needs to be revealed. Throughout their relationship, these two are repeatedly shown as being out of sync with one another through the contrast between their juxtaposed thoughts and reported misinterpretations of the other's behavior. As Booth points out, omniscient narration is generally considered by authors to provide greater "control of dramatic irony" than first-person or narration with limited access to characters' minds (172-3). Anderson capitalizes on this strength

by having similar word choices and ideas appear in Hugh and Clara's thoughts, but the two never seem to be on the same page about these similarities and what they mean. One example comes when Clara forms her first opinion of Hugh as a man that she could marry. She prefers his personality and demeanor to that of her only other male acquaintances, her father and his business partner Alfred Buckley, whom she characterizes as the wolf and the wolfhound, respectively. In Hugh, though, she sees more than just a desire for glory and material wealth:

> He was, she decided, very like a horse; an honest, powerful horse, a horse that was humanized by the mysterious, hungering thing that expressed itself through his eyes. "If I have to live with an animal; if, as Kate Chanceller once said, we women have to decide what other animal we are to live with before we can begin being humans, I would rather live with a strong, kindly horse than a wolf or a wolfhound," she found herself thinking. (*Poor* 248)

While Clara is admiring his horse-like qualities, Hugh notices her observation and interprets it in terms similar to hers:

> Then he became aware of the fact that as she talked the woman looked at him in an absorbed, almost calculating way. It was as though he were a horse and she were a buyer examining him to be sure he was sound and of a kindly disposition. While she stood beside him her eyes were shining and her cheeks were flushed. The awakening, assertive male thing in him whispered that the flush on her cheeks and the shining eyes were indicative of something. (*Poor* 252)

The "male thing" within Hugh leads him to assume that Clara must be interested in him romantically, but his doubts soon get the best of him as he thinks about Clara Butterworth as the very definition of a lady:

> Almost at once he decided that the thing he had seen in Clara's eyes and that was sister to something he had seen in Rose McCoy's eyes had nothing to do with him. The mantle of vanity he had been wearing dropped off and left him naked and sad. "What would she be wanting of me?" he asked himself, and got up from the log to look with critical eyes at his long, bony body. (*Poor* 254)

Hugh convinces himself that he must have misinterpreted Clara's intentions because a woman of her status could not possibly be attracted to him. He shows disbelief that any woman could be interested in him, even Rose McCoy, the daughter of the woman with whom he had boarded. Hugh seems even more suspect of Clara possibly having feelings for him because of her wealth, which he notes when he admires her clothes and admits, "Beside Clara, Rose McCoy looked dowdy and commonplace. The repetition of words ("kindly") and the horse comparison suggest that the characters do share similarities in terms of how they think, but their insecurities and the roles established for each of them by society keep them in place and out of touch with one another due to their differences in economic status and gender.

Hugh and Clara are constantly shown, through the narration of their respective thoughts, as wanting similar things from one another, but neither ever seems to act upon these shared needs. In one instance, Hugh and Clara walk through town and notice some unrest amongst the factory workers. Focused on Hugh's confusion regarding the situation, the narration reveals, "He wondered if Clara would know what was wrong and

would tell him if he asked. He wanted to ask many questions. 'That's what I want a woman for. I want some one close to me who understands things and will tell me about them,' he thought" (*Poor* 258). Clara does not appear to notice Hugh's need for answers in this instance, but later in the novel, just after the two have decided to marry, she understands that he has something he wants to say, but cannot articulate it or even make himself speak. Clara correctly perceives that Hugh would like her help, but finally refuses to provide it:

> Realizing a little Hugh's difficulty in expressing what he must feel, she wanted to help him, but when she turned and saw how he did not look at her but continually stared into the darkness, pride kept her silent. "I'll have to wait until he's ready. Already I've taken things too much into my own hands. I'll put through this marriage, but when it comes to anything else he'll have to begin," she told herself, and a lump came into her throat and tears to her eyes. (*Poor* 275)

Hugh obviously does want Clara's help and would like for her to explain things to him. Clara refuses to help her future husband, though, because she feels like she has already done too much of the work in the relationship. Her resistance to his needs could be read as a sign that the two cannot work together. However, the fact that Clara's first instinct was to take charge and guide Hugh shows that she understands him and automatically reacts in a manner that would meet his needs.

Within these examples of the wide range of internal struggle in *Poor White* characters' thoughts are presented within quotation marks to signify that they come directly from those individuals. This depiction of a character's thoughts in quotation marks without any kind of signal phrase such as "he said" is known as free indirect

discourse. This style, which represents characters' perceptions in, so to speak, their own terms and allows for a more immediate depiction of the character's perspective and feelings by maintaining "some of the features of the character's enunciation" (Prince 34). However, despite the heightened accuracy in portraying the focal character's thought process, the possibility for disagreement between the quoted portion and the external narrator's description of the action once again raises questions about reliability. Here, Chatman's theory of fallible filtration feels particularly useful considering the narration in this novel is more closely related to the focalizing or filtering approach to storytelling that the narratologist's concept addresses. In regards to traditional questions regarding reliability, the reader's skepticism is directed towards the narrator. Chatman explains, "But what is 'unreliable' in fallible filtration is not the narrator's account of story events but only the thoughts or speeches of the filter character" (149). As opposed to questioning whether the thoughts and opinions of the characters are being relayed accurately, the reader places the character under scrutiny for the biases apparent in his or her perceptions. The term "fallible" is intended to remove some of the stigma that comes with "unreliable" by emphasizing that the filter does not choose to be a storyteller: "After all, the character has not *asked* that her mind be entered or her conversation overheard by a narrator and reported to a narratee" (Chatman 150). These characters are often fallible in their assumptions about others as a result of the inability to connect that Anderson believed persisted in the industrialized society. The use of fallible filtration makes the frustration caused by this disconnect more palpable for the reader because the misunderstandings between characters are made more dramatic than omniscient narration without filtration could provide.

Anderson's non-personified, uninvolved narration in *Poor White* served to reflect the lack of connection between characters, while his use of first-person narration in his short story collection *The Triumph of the Egg* focuses more on one individual's perspective on a given experience. Using methods reminiscent of the frames and the apostrophe to the poet that called attention to the narration in *Winesburg, Ohio*, numerous stories in this collection include a character who announces the textual features of the tale being told. The narrators here admit that the storytelling process is intended to help that individual better understand the experience that he (always a "he") went through.

The very first story in the collection, "The Dumb Man," reverts to one of the most notable elements from the "Hands" chapter of *Winesburg, Ohio*. The narrator opens the story by explaining, "There is a story.—I cannot tell it.—I have no words.—The story is almost forgotten but sometimes I remember" (*Triumph* 1). The speaker goes on to relate basic descriptions of the players featured in this story that he claims he cannot tell. However, just like the narrator who called for the poet's help in the tale of Wing Biddlebaum, the narrator insists that he is not capable of telling this story when he actually goes on to do just that. He does know that the story begins with three men in a house; one is young and jovial, another a bearded-man noted as being plagued with doubt, and the third is described as a man "who has wicked eyes and who moves nervously about the room rubbing his hands together" (*Triumph* 1). There is also a woman waiting upstairs, and a fourth man—"a white silent man"—who comes into the house and goes to her. The man with wicked eyes appears to be troubled by the coupling while the bearded one tries to comfort him, and the younger man merely laughs. Although the two older men appear to be the ones more affected by the action of the story, the narrator does not

focus on them in his attempts to decipher the story: "Both the old grey bearded man and the wicked one puzzle me. I think and think but cannot understand them. Most of the time however I do not think of them at all. I keep thinking about the dandified man who laughed all through my story" (*Triumph* 3). While his is still a bare-bones version lacking details or authoritative commentary, the narrator contradicts one of his first claims that he has "no words" by offering these descriptions of the characters and the situation, even though his "story" consists mostly of his caveats about how he cannot finish this task. The narrator concludes the story with his own explanation of his desperation to tell the story and his belief that the laughing, dandified young man is the key to piecing together the whole thing:

> If I could understand him I could understand everything. I could run through the world telling a wonderful story. I would no longer be dumb. Why was I not given words? Why am I dumb? I have a wonderful story to tell but know no way to tell it (*Triumph* 4).

While the rest of the commentary from the narrator states that he is merely unable to properly relate the story, this is the first mention of the fact that he does not actually know its significance. Much like "The Book of the Grotesques," this elusive story is meant to provide greater insight into life as a whole. Although he does not yet know the story's meaning, the narrator implies that by telling the story, he would be able to make sense of it.

The brief opening chapter's insistence on the power of storytelling for comprehension introduces a theme that occurs throughout *The Triumph of the Egg*. The characters, especially the first-person narrators in the individual stories, place great faith

in the power of narration and storytelling to create meaning and to help them understand themselves and their relationships with others. As opposed to narrators who merely transmit the meaning inherent in the story by telling, these narrators have a specific purpose. Anderson presents narrators relating their own personal experiences and expecting the process to make clear their own life lesson to be learned. Booth offers the term "narrator-agents" for storytellers who are so active within their story; this phrase emphasizes the agency that self-conscious narrators like the ones in these stories have to use narration for their own purposes (153, 155). The very title of "I Want to Know Why" announces the quest for understanding that the narrator embarks upon through the process of telling his story. In this case, the narrator is a fifteen-year-old boy reflecting on a trip taken by him and some friends roughly a year ago from their home in Kentucky to Saratoga to witness horse racing in its grandest venue. The young man, who never shares his name with the reader, has just begun to describe the process of their journey when he reveals that one of the boys, Henry, has a father who is a professional gambler. The other boys' fathers voice their concerns about their sons being influenced by the world of gambling. The reminder of such worries spurs the narrator to admit the reason for sharing his story:

> That's all right and I guess the men know what they are talking about, but I don't see what it's got to do with Henry or with horses either. That's what I'm writing this story about. I'm puzzled. I'm getting to be a man and want to think straight and be O.K., and there's something I saw at the race meeting at the eastern track I can't figure out. (*Triumph* 8-9)

The narrator is relying on the storytelling process to clear up his confusion, in this case as a necessary step in completing his transition into manhood. The fact that the narrator remains nameless throughout the story suggests the instability of his identity during the process of growing up and emphasizes his need to understanding his own experience so that he can then understand himself. In fact, the narrators from both this story and "The Dumb Man" display an urgent desire to understand the meaning of a story in order to gain control of their lives and develop as individuals. Here, though, rather than trying to piece together a story that will have an effect on others, the young narrator is working to extract the meaning from his own experience for personal reasons. In his article "The Arts of Winesburg and Bidwell, Ohio," Jon S. Lawry identifies this reliance on transferring a past experience into art as a means for understanding as a common theme in Anderson's work. The article discusses the classic myth within American literature of the character's journey out of the small town and into the big city. Lawry argues that most Americans assume that one must leave for the city and abandon the small town forever. Most literary depictions of this scenario include references to the rural home as fond memories but of little significance. Lawry sees Anderson altering this notion in his depictions of rural life to give more credit to the small-town experiences: "In Anderson's myth, the general American 'you' must light out; but he finds that only the seemingly abandoned and discredited source ('old' country, or old hometown) has much if any affection or meaning; yet he can't go home again" (55). Small town existence and the lessons learned there become crucial for the character who has since left and is encountering problems in the city. For Anderson, "Past 'story' holds the answer to present question" (Lawry 54). Lawry cites "I Want to Know Why" as the one of

Anderson's works that best represents the influence of the "past story" over the present situation. The story's narrator tells this story from his boyhood in order to advance his current transition into manhood.

The boy continues after announcing his intentions for sharing his story, now detailing his deep love for a particular horse that he sees and the connection he feels with the jockey through their mutual admiration of the animal. The narrator even tells of his return trip home and filling his parents in on the details before he reveals, "I told everything we done except one thing. I did and saw that alone. That's what I'm writing about. It got me upset. I think about it at night. Here it is" (*Triumph* 12). The noticeable shift to shorter, choppier sentence structures in this passage calls attention to this section, which acts as the second set-up of the narrator's purpose for telling the story. Rather than simply telling the entire story and letting the reader determine where the significant moment lies, the narrator plants an unmistakable signpost to lead to the crux of the story. Narratology scholar Wayne Booth details the history of criticism differentiating "between 'showing,' which is artistic, and 'telling,' which is inartistic" (8). Booth, however, challenges these classifications by providing numerous examples of successful uses of telling for the sake of conserving space and quickly advancing action from the likes of canonical texts *Tristram Shandy* and the *Decameron*. The direct "telling" in the narration of "I Want to Know Why," while critical to the concept of understanding life through art, also suits the limited scope of the short story in terms of what can be dealt with in the allotted space. The young man's awareness of an audience and consciousness of the way in which he tells the story mimics defining characteristics of metafiction, which breaks the "fourth wall" that divides the worlds of fiction and

reality. The narrator not only tells the reader which details are crucial, but he comments on the order and manner in which he relates these details. This awareness and commentary from the narrator place the reader's focus on him and the process that he goes through to make sense of the story as part of his own growth into adulthood.

Eventually, the narrator explains how he was betrayed by the jockey when the man took credit for his horse's win in the race and used his boasting to attract a woman whom the young boy does not find desirable enough to justify the degradation of the noble horse. The story concludes with the boy explaining, "Sometimes I'm so mad about it I want to fight someone. It gives me the fandtods. What did he do it for? I want to know why" (*Triumph* 20). The fact that the story concludes with the title question informs the reader that the narrator is still in search of an answer. The storytelling process has failed to provide the clarity that the young man was expecting to find through the narrative process.

While the first two entries in *The Triumph of the Egg* focus on the narration's self-awareness and self-referential moments to make the storytelling process more apparent to the reader, two of the other most notable stories, which still display these elements, also begin to play with the question of reliability, often by calling attention to their own inconsistencies. "The Other Woman" begins by introducing the two different speakers who will appear throughout the story: the narrator and the man that he meets whose affair is being described. The opening line offers the narrator's first evaluation of the other character to suggest that the man's version might be unreliable:

> "I am in love with my wife," he said—a superfluous remark, as I had not questioned his attachment to the woman he had married. We walked for ten

> minutes and then he said it again. I turned to look at him. He began to talk and told me the tale I am now about to set down. (*Triumph* 33)

As soon as the narrator explains that the man's claim regarding his relationship with his wife is completely unsolicited, that man's motives for sharing this information become an issue. The voice of the narrator comes through to tip the reader off that something is amiss with this man's story. The narrator begins by providing a retelling of the other man's experience, but by the third page, all of the exposition is being provided through quotes from the man who had the affair. His direct account then embeds itself within the frame established by the narrator. Although the narrator is no longer filtering the other man's story and providing assessment of the story's validity, the character takes it upon himself to address the questions that the narrator and, by extension, the reader might have about some of the claims that he makes in justifying his actions. The man's awareness of how his story must appear to someone else and his attempt to frame the tale in the most self-serving way comes through in speeches like this one:

> "Although I have tried to make everything clear I have not told you what the woman I married is like. I have emphasized, you see, the other woman. I make the blind statement that I love my wife, and to a man of your shrewdness that means nothing at all. To tell the truth, had I not started to speak of this matter I would feel more comfortable. It is inevitable that I give you the impression that I am in love with the tobacconist's wife. That is not true." (*Triumph* 41)

Just as the revelation of how the story spontaneously began is sure to spark suspicion in the minds of readers, the hyper-awareness that the man displays regarding how his telling of it must appear and the desire to refute these assumptions help to cast doubt upon his

intentions. This direct commentary from the man himself never receives any feedback from the narrator, as the entire last half of the story, through the focus on the character's personal account of the affair, is presented as if the man is having a conversation with himself. He often appears to be trying to reassure himself that he did not intend to cheat on his fiancé just as much, if not more, than he wants to convince the narrator. In one such instance of this behavior, the man quotes his own inner monologue as he justifies why he should ask his servant to leave the apartment when the tobacconist's wife is scheduled to come over, even though the protagonist claims that he has changed his mind and will not sleep with the woman. He tells himself, "If I want my servant out of the apartment it is because I do not want him to hear me talk with the woman. I cannot be rude to her. I will have to make some kind of an explanation" (*Triumph* 40-41). The fact that he has to reassure himself of his own explanation of his behavior suggests the possibility of his unreliability or fallibility. The term to apply to this character appears to be the former, even though the classification is usually preserved for the actual narrator. Fallibility is meant to give the filter character the benefit of the doubt regarding faulty storytelling because that individual is not conscious of their narrational responsibilities (Chatman). The man in "The Other Woman," however, instigated the telling of his experience and makes repeated reference to the way in which he structures the narrative. His inconsistency and unreliability can be perceived in statements such as, "I am afraid I muddled this matter in trying to tell it," and, "Twice now I have said that after that evening I never thought of the other woman at all. That is partially true but, sometimes in the evening...the feeling of her comes sharply into my body and mind" (*Triumph* 43-44). Just as Anderson utilized the shifting access to consciousness in order to best

establish the troubled relationships in *Poor White*, the emphasis on the main character's version of the events in "The Other Woman" portrays how the man has slanted the tale of his infidelity through elements of narration.

The story from *The Triumph of the Egg* that has continually attracted the most praise is the one that inspired the title for the entire collection. Anderson was so proud of "The Egg" that he originally used the short story's exact title to name the whole book, but in order to avoid giving off the impression that the collection was padded with filler around the one outstanding piece of work, he altered the title (Townsend). Once again, the author relies upon a first-person narrator to recount a personal experience, but this character does not appear to have any motivation to gain greater understanding of the situation. Anderson returns to the fictional town of Bidwell, the setting of *Poor White*, for the setting of this story and even has the narrator's father as an employee of Tom Butterworth, Clara's father from *Poor White*. Early in the story, though, the patriarch decides to quit his job with Butterworth in order to pursue his own business ventures. According to Lawry, the setting of Bidwell in Anderson's work is synonymous with a certain form of narration that differs from the multiple methods at work in tales based in Winesburg:

> In place of the story-bringers from the past, the Willardian receiver who departs, and the doubled story-utilization in the present associated with the old writer and the occasional authorial "I," Bidwell seems to offer one single consciousness, presently reflecting upon its own past story. (Lawry 59)

Lawry recognizes the numerous players who contribute in constructing the narrative of *Winesburg, Ohio*, including the grotesques who supply their own experiences, the soon-

to-be "artist-narrator" George Willard, and the narrator who constructs the entire framework for the chapters of the story-cycle. Lawry points out that Anderson adopts a simplified, more direct approach for the sake of the reflective, nostalgic nature of the Bidwell story.

Michael D. West's article "Sherwood Anderson's Triumph: 'The Egg'" focuses on the mode of narration in his attempt to identify the elements of the story that make it such a highly regarded piece in Anderson's catalog. While this story has often been cited as one of Anderson's best, West found a deficiency of support from critics justifying this classification. In West's listing of the story's strongest features, he explains:

> Indeed, any attempt to explain "what happens" in the story must consider the adult narrator's recollection of his childhood experiences and the implied attitude, both in the past and present, toward his parents. It is because the method of narration that the story is often placed in the dubious genre of tragi-comedy. (West 685)

The article goes on to provide a reading of the narrator's tone that portrays him as pitying his father's desperate attempt to entertain a diner in his restaurant and his ultimate humiliation. West points to the account of the embarrassing exchange with the customer and the narrator's shift in reference from "my father" to simply "father" in order to distance himself from the older man's disgrace. The distance provided by time and the boy's growth allows the now-matured narrator to provide the full story and a sense of humor to an experience that was obviously quite upsetting at the time. The integral nature of the narrational devices is further demonstrated by the fact that Anderson's attempt to dramatize the story in the form of a play failed to capture the proper "tragic-comedy" tone that the narrator provides (West 685).

While the narration of "The Egg" from the first-person perspective of the now-matured narrator is ideal for explaining the significance of a single, seemingly innocent event that affected his entire family, this chapter along with "The Other Woman" strays from the notion conveyed in the collection's first two stories regarding the power of narration in self-reflection and understanding. The two opening stories in *The Triumph of the Egg* include the narrators who appear most adamant regarding storytelling's ability to aid in comprehension, but these characters ultimately fail in their quests. "The Dumb Man" is left still wishing he had the words to spread his story and the boy in "I Want to Know Why" continues to utter this very statement as he struggles to find answers. These disappointments in the search for resolution lead to the subsequent chapters abandoning this ulterior motive in the storytelling process. Anderson's later stories focus more on the process itself in terms of what is included in the narrative. The stories begin to challenge the notion that an involved first-person narrator can arrive at an ultimate truth when that narrator can shape and even distort the story in any way he chooses. Here, Anderson starts to take more liberties with the power a narrator can have over a story and explores ways in which the act of storytelling can become more significant than the story itself.

Chapter 3

Radical Changes in *Dark Laughter*

The publication of Sherwood Anderson's novel *Dark Laughter* in 1925 positions the work within a year noted as an artistic peak for the Modernist period, primarily due to the release of such texts as Hemingway's short story collection *In Our Time* and Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (Wagner-Martin). Anderson held a high opinion of the novel's potential, which biographer Kim Townsend suggests was common for all of the author's publication: "It was even more intense, he said, than *Many Marriages*, 'even broader and has a greater swing to it.' And like so much that he had written before, it was going to be 'by far the best novel I have written'" (223). With *Many Marriages*, Anderson had ambitions to challenge conservative standards regarding the themes of sexuality and infidelity (Rideout 26). The main character plans to leave his wife for another woman, but not before he can explain to his wife and daughter, while he paces his bedroom naked, why this marriage has been unsatisfactory (Rideout 25). While the thematic elements definitely helped Anderson achieve his goal of challenging convention, the structural flaws weakened the novel's impact. Gertrude Stein gave *Many Marriages* a positive review, mostly due to her respect for Anderson, but she admitted that the novel lacked direction, telling Anderson himself, "There should be a beginning a middle and an ending, and you have a tendency to make it a beginning an ending an ending and an ending" (Townsend 191). *Many Marriages* was Anderson's attempt to tackle controversial thematic issues, but *Dark Laughter* finds the author focusing more on narrational techniques while the content supports this interest by featuring a main

character who worked as a writer and experienced his own struggles with the writing process.

Anderson had great confidence in his stylistic choices for *Dark Laughter* as he saw them influenced by the work of James Joyce:

> When speaking of a copy of *Ulysses* that he had lent to [George] Daugherty, Anderson claims: "I think as a matter of prose experiment you will sense what Mr. Joyce was driving at when you read *Dark Laughter*. As I think I told you here, I very frankly took his experiment as a starting place for the prose rhythm of the book." (Curry 237)

Despite Anderson's expectations that he could build on Joyce's ideas and techniques to achieve his greatest success, *Dark Laughter* was panned by both the author's contemporaries and those he influenced. F. Scott Fitzgerald had admired Anderson's previous work, but deemed *Dark Laugh* "lousy," and William Faulkner would later say that Anderson should have ended his career after that novel (Townsend 227). Nevertheless, the novel became Anderson most commercially successful publication. The basic set-up of the narration within *Dark Laughter* are similar to those found in Anderson's previous works with a non-dramatized third person narrator and several central characters through whom the storytelling is focalized. Anderson attempted to achieve artistic growth through the employment of techniques associated with modern literature from Joyce and the like, particularly stream-of-consciousness narration. When the narration is focalized through the thoughts of Bruce Dudley, one of the main characters, there are often running lists of memories or glimpses of the people that he knows running through his head:

> Sponge the workman telling old Grey to go to hell, offering to kick him out of his shop. The governor of a state riding in a livery hack because a workman wouldn't be hurried into doing a bum job. Bernice, his wife, at her typewriter in Chicago, doing special articles for the Sunday papers, writing that story about the man and the dummy wax figure of a woman in a shop window. Sponge Martin and his woman going off to celebrate because Sponge had told the local prince, the banker, to go to hell. (*Dark* 31)

Critics were not receptive to Anderson's change in technique; it was perceived as an appropriation of a popular modern technique that stood in contrast to the most appreciated element of the author's work—the sense of purity and honesty in his depiction of "common everyday American lives" (Hoffman 243). Irving Howe includes the novel in a list of Anderson's "lesser" work and categorizes it as typical of a part of Anderson's personality that "took to cultural fashion the way other novelists take to drink" (197). Fredrick J. Hoffman's "The Voices of Sherwood Anderson" offers a similar observation by labeling Anderson's modernistic ventures as "failures" and saying that the author "took to contemporary modes eagerly after *Winesburg* established him as a 'literary hero'" (243). The implication from the phrase "took to" in both critiques suggests the way in which Anderson tried out techniques like stream-of-consciousness because of its "fashionable" status even though it did not come naturally to him. Sherwood Anderson's experiment with a new narrational style is reflected in the content of *Dark Laughter* through discussions regarding which artists are allowed to use certain artistic techniques and why. Although Anderson's detractors were suspicious of his narrational choices in this novel, the author utilizes stream-of-consciousness to represent

the elusive nature of language and narration which is a recurring theme throughout his work.

While much of Sherwood Anderson's fiction is noted for containing autobiographical elements, especially in reference to the author's own Midwestern roots and the nature of his dysfunctional personal relationships, *Dark Laughter* offers the most focus on issues surrounding the function of art and the struggles that a writer such as himself must face. As opposed to the narrators and focal characters from previous novels and stories who were not professional writers but had ambitions to write or were writing for the sake of sharing and understanding their own experiences, the character of Bruce Dudley worked as a writer for a living and circulated within literary circles. The descriptions of Bruce's past life amongst artists closely mirror facts from Anderson's own life in his Chicago apartment at 735 Cass Street, a building that housed numerous artists. Although Anderson lived among them, he felt a distinct difference between his own style and approach in comparison to the "terrible seriousness" that he observed in the others (Townsend 104). Bruce Dudley frequently mentions his own isolation from the collection of artists that his wife Bernice preferred to socialize with. The character offers critiques of their art and their relationships to their art. In one example, he says of a painter friend's representation of his wife, "He had done Bernice in broad lines of color and had twisted her mouth a little to one side. One ear had been twice the size of the other. That was for distortion's sake. Distortion often got effects you couldn't get at all by straight painting" (*Dark* 47). Bruce's jealousy and distrust of the painter become sublimated in his critique of the artist's talent in which he questions the man's relationship to his art. The narrator continues by explaining, "The distortion idea meant

something to the European artists who began it no doubt, but he doubted the young man's knowing quite what it meant" (*Dark* 54). Anderson himself was often criticized as anti-intellectual and uninformed about the artistic world, particularly the traditions of Europe, but his character's reaction to this situation provides an alternative rationale for such resistance to trends and movements. Bruce's complaint is not with distortion itself, but rather it seems to be with the idea of Americans adopting fashionable aspects of European culture without understanding the true purpose or meaning behind such ideas. The painter was merely imitating the appearance of distortion without understanding the implications or significance of the style. At one point, the character utters the phrase "For the sake of art" repeatedly before he examines his own feelings towards art and those who create it:

> Did such men as himself and Tom Wills want to laugh at it? Did they incline to think of art as a silly, mawkish sort of exhibitionism on the part of silly people because to do so made them seem to themselves rather grand and noble—above all such nonsense—something of that sort? (*Dark* 52)

Bruce's awareness of his own tendency towards mocking art and the selfish reasons behind it parallel with Anderson's own persona; through his narrative, the author unpacks the thought behind his sense of superiority from the other artists in the building on Cass Street.

In order to avoid the type of uninformed artistry that Bruce noticed in the American painter appropriating European style, the character seeks an approach to the creation of art that mirrors a laborer's skill. Bruce fixates on men like his local butcher or his friend Sponge Martin, the factory worker, and the effortless ways in which these men

do their work. While at the market with Bernice, Bruce ignores conversation with his wife in order to focus on the employee's skill in his job:

> What he was thinking about was the old meat-cutter, the deft quick hands of the old-meat cutter. They represented to Bruce perhaps a way in which he would like to handle words. Well now, it might be that he did not want to handle words at all. He was a little afraid of words. They were such tricky, elusive things. (*Dark* 25)

Examples of Bruce's struggles with the writing process are a repeated theme throughout the novel, and his fixation with laborers who manufacture objects reflects his own desire that writing could be created in the same way. He even takes up manual labor in the Grey Wheel Factory in order to escape the headaches of journalism and working with words. As he grows more competent in his labor, the narrator reveals, "He had begun to get a little skill with his fingers. Could one in time get a little skill with thoughts, too? Could thoughts and images be laid on paper some day as Sponge Martin laid on varnish, never too thick, never too thin, never lumpy?" (*Dark* 31) The desire to construct ideas with words as if they were items being assembled in a factory stems from the frustration with the writing process.

In addition to his admiration of the connection between the laborer and his product as an ideal model for the relationship between the writer and the writing process, Bruce also idealizes the connection between African Americans and language:

> Words were caught up, tossed about, held in the throat. Word-lovers, sound-lovers—the blacks seemed to hold a tone in some warm place, under their red tongues perhaps. Their thick lips were walls under which the tone hid. Unconscious love of inanimate things lost to the whites—skies, the river, a moving

> boat—black mysticism—never expressed except in song or in the movements of bodies. (*Dark* 106)

Bruce naturalizes the relationship between African Americans and self-expression, although his emphasis is on physical and spoken forms as opposed to the written word. The very title of the novel references the difference of blacks' laughter compared to that of whites, and the text portrays African American expression including laughter, song, and speech as baser and thus more honest than their white counterparts.

Ultimately, Bruce Dudley pursues these approaches to art both to improve his own writing but also as a means of seeking revenge on the more "sophisticated" artists whom he had felt rejected by in the city. The narration hones in on Bruce's rationalization of why skilled labor interests him in relation to artistic endeavors:

> If a man got so he could use his own thoughts, his own feelings, his own fancies as Sponge could use a paint-brush, what then? What would the man be like? Would that be what an artist was? It would be a fine to-do, if he, Bruce, in running away from Bernice and her crowd, from the conscious artists, had only done so because he wanted to be just what they wanted to be. (*Dark* 123)

While Bruce admits here that he does envy the status of the artists that he previously looked down upon, he also recognizes his own ideals of what words and writing should accomplish which differs from that prescribed by the so-called "conscious artists."

These questions regarding what makes an artist and Bruce's desire to hone his writing as a "skill" as opposed to an art stem from his frustration with the intangibility of language. His description of words as "tricky, elusive things" coincides with the focus on narration and the use of words in Anderson's storytelling. Bruce is portrayed as

frustrated by his attempts to support himself as a professional writer because of this exhausting nature of words:

> All the time he wanted to do something—write perhaps—but every time he had tried his own words and ideas, put down, made him weary. Perhaps he had got too deep into the newspaper cliché, the jargon—jargon of words, ideas, moods. As he had gone along Bruce had put words down on paper less and less. (*Dark* 20)

In addition to the unreliability of words, Bruce is further troubled by the effort that must be expended in order to express himself and create the meaning that he desires. Anderson could be referring to his own difficulties with finding the right words, usually resorting to "the thing" in his descriptions of abstract feelings and thoughts. Anderson portrays the relationship between laborer and product as purer than that shared by writer and text, particularly in the art of his American contemporaries, like those in the Cass building and the painter playing with the idea of distortion.

Dark Laughter establishes the inspiration for this emphasis on art, especially the written word, by describing the fascination with literature that exists within the culture. In fact, Bruce Dudley is not the only character to have his relationship with writing explored in the novel. Both Aline and Fred Grey are influenced by the literary world and speak of themselves in relation to their reading preferences. Bruce is obviously the central character most engrossed in the world of the written word and the one with the most at stake in regards to artistic and literary culture. He describes the obsession with writing and other forms of expression that he witnessed in the city:

> There was great pride in wordslinging. Such and such a man knew how to sling words. Little groups all over town talking of word men, sound men, color men and

> Bruce's wife, Bernice, knew them all. What was it all about, this eternal fussing about painting, music, writing? There was something in it. (*Dark* 39)

As someone who claims to have had journalistic aspirations at one point, Bruce's apparent confusion over the fascination with the use of language reads as somewhat incongruous with his aims. Part of Bruce's resistance toward the artist culture could be a result of the mentality displayed by his friend Tom Wills in criticizing the lack of power and agency in the writing of the period:

> "Have you noticed, going along the streets, that all of the people you see are tired out, impotent?" he asked. "What is a newspaper—the most impotent thing in the world. What is the theater? Have you gone much lately? They give you such a weariness that your back aches, and the movies, God, the movies are ten times worse, and if this war isn't a sign of universal impotence, sweeping over the world like disease, then I don't know much." (*Dark* 42)

In Anderson's previous works, the ability to write and tell a story was equated with control and mastery of one's own experiences, but writing and storytelling designed for the masses loses that power.

Anderson obviously expects his implied reader to be familiar with the artistic traditions and literature that his characters mention as this background information is necessary for understanding what these references say about the characters. The reading habits of Aline and Fred Grey, for example, take on greater meaning when one knows enough to infer the significance of the mentioned authors and titles. The reader learns about Aline's father's preferred forms of literature and her later reaction to it:

> There was Mark Twain, who wrote a book called "The Innocents Abroad," that Aline's father had loved. When she was a child he was always reading it and laughing with delight over it, and it had really been nothing but a kind of small boy's rather nasty disdain of things he couldn't understand. Pap for vulgar minds. (*Dark* 168)

The narration here is being focalized through Aline's point of view, so the implication is that it is her commentary criticizing Twain's work. However, Sherwood Anderson himself was a well-known Twain fan; in fact, the author's influence has often been cited in analysis of Anderson's *Poor White*. The contrast between the author's known opinion and that of the character suggests that the author expects the reader to know better than to believe the harsh review of *The Innocents Abroad.* Anderson's expectations of his audience play upon the various types of audiences that are addressed in any novel according to narrative theorist Peter Rabinowitz. In his article "Truth in Fiction: A Reexamination of Audiences," Rabinowitz describes the features that differentiate the "actual audience" of readers from the implied or "authorial audience" imagined by the author, who must create "certain assumptions about his readers' beliefs, knowledge, and familiarity with conventions" (213). The "narrative audience" is defined as having, like the "authorial audience," necessary background knowledge to understand the author's references, but a greater capacity to suspend disbelief that allows them to go along with the narrator's story and accept the action as possible. The *ideal* narrative audience takes a step beyond the suspension of disbelief by believing whole-heartedly everything the narrator says and accepting the biases that he or she injects into the narration. In order to differentiate between the two types of narrative audiences, Rabinowitz explains:

> The distance between the narrative audience and the ideal narrative audience tends to lie along an axis of ethics or interpretation. The ideal narrative audience agrees with the narrator that certain events are good or that a particular analysis is correct, while the narrative audience is called upon to judge him. (220)

In this case when Aline, as the narration's focal character at this point expresses disdain for *The Innocents Abroad*, the author hopes that his readers will agree with him that Aline's critique establishes her as out of touch with classic American literature. This is only a small offense on Aline's part, but it does serve as a warning sign to mark her as different. Her eventual affair and the choices she makes afterwards are designed to further alienate her from the reader. She plans to become pregnant by Bruce but allow Fred to believe that he is the father. Following her first encounter with Bruce, she comes off as dismissive and cold:

> As for Bruce—well, she had selected him—not consciously. Things had happened. She had been so much bolder than she planned. Really she had only intended playing with him, exerting her power over him. One can grow very tired and bored waiting—waiting in a garden on a hill in Indiana. (*Dark* 258)

Aline received what she wanted from Bruce, and now she is willing to cast him aside and say that he never mattered in the first place; she merely needed *someone* and he was the one she chose. The mention of the Midwestern location at the end of the passage also further suggests Aline's distaste for American life and culture. Although Anderson frequently created characters feeling trapped in the Middle West, when this attitude is expressed by a French woman an American audience can be counted on to perceive her remarks as condescending.

Not only is Anderson requiring his audience to resist Aline's opinions, he is also complicating Bruce's earlier complaints about artistic integrity, or what Wayne G. Booth calls an author's "sincerity." Booth asserts, "One sign that there is no connection between the author's feelings and any necessary technique or achieved quality of his work is the fact that we can never securely infer, without external evidence, whether an author has *felt* his work or written with cold detachment" (82). Booth's response to claims intended to determine a writer's attachment to the characters and ideas that he represents in fiction could be just as easily applied to Bruce's assertion that the American painter was not "attached" to distortion. Bruce assumes that the artist cannot possibly be connected to the subject of his painting or the style, and, therefore, the intentions behind the use of distortion are invalid. However, in the case of Aline's dislike of Twain, Anderson himself shows signs of authorial detachment by portraying an opinion that he obviously does not believe. Despite the various similarities between Bruce Dudley and Sherwood Anderson in regards to their feelings about art, the author must employ techniques for developing his central characters that contradict some of Bruce's ideals about true, realistic art. Between the discussion of Twain and the mentions of distortion along with mentions of other problems plaguing contemporary art, Anderson appears to be addressing an audience that would be familiar with such texts and ideas while also being open to skepticism which questions the validity of various artistic styles and forms.

The influence of Joyce on Anderson's work is highlighted in the reference to *Ulysses* as a significant work for both Bruce Dudley and Fred Grey, Bruce's employer at the factory and Aline's husband . In fact, Joyce's novel is one of the few artistic works that Bruce mentions with admiration:

> Once he had read a book by Zola, "La Terre," and later, but a short time before he left Chicago, Tom Wills had shown him a new book by the Irishman Joyce, *Ulysses*. There were certain pages. Realism in writing lifted up sharp to something burning and raw like a raw sore. Others coming to look at the sores. (*Dark* 120)

Unlike the misguided application of distortion by a painter assuming an air of sophistication, Joyce's work is viewed as being directly extracted from the realities of human life, so much so that Fred Grey equates his experience with those of Joyce and his fictional characters. The reader learns of Fred's familiarity with the author's work when the narrator reveals, "He could imagine himself a fellow like that Bloom in the book *Ulysses* and it was evident that Joyce, the writer and dreamer, was in the same boat" (*Dark* 126). The choice of *Ulysses* as a point of reference for a character like Fred, intended to be the clueless husband betrayed by his wife's adultery, is curious given the fact that Joyce's work is hardly known for its accessibility. In fact, Rabinowitz cites the author's experimental text *Finnegans Wake* as a novel that aims to challenge its authorial audience, to the point of alienation in many cases (213). Perhaps Joyce's techniques for distortion and disorientation are acceptable to Bruce because the author is more familiar with the traditions of these elements. The fact that the distortionist painter was an American seemed to play a key role in inciting Bruce's backlash. If this is the case, American author Sherwood Anderson's use of radical narrational techniques inspired by originators such as Joyce becomes complicated and open to similar criticism from Bruce Dudley regarding the inappropriate appropriation of a style that he does not truly understand.

Despite the complaints from characters like Bruce Dudley about the pitfalls of disingenuous use of trendy, fashionable forms of expression, Sherwood Anderson employs a few technical elements within *Dark Laughter* that differ from his usual style and reflect those associated with the high modernists; in particular, Anderson frequently utilizes stream-of-consciousness narration and incorporates seemingly unrelated poetic lines into the prose. Unlike *Poor White*'s constantly shifting focus, this novel restricts each chapter to one focal character from the possibility of Bruce Dudley, Aline, or Fred Grey. In fact, Bruce remains the sole focal character until Chapter Fifteen, or Book Six, when the focus finally shifts to Aline's perspective, and later the attention moves to Fred's point of view. At the start of Chapter Fifteen, the reader sees Aline's side of a scene already relayed by Bruce. The chapter begins with the description of the first time she ever saw Bruce:

> Perhaps she had figured it all out from the beginning and didn't quite dare tell herself. She saw him first, walking with a small man, heavily mustached, up a cobblestone street that led from her husband's factory, and the impression she had of her own feelings was just that she would like to stop him some evening as he came out at the factory door. (*Dark* 133)

This same event was shown from Bruce's perspective in Chapter Eleven when the narration revealed:

> Before the factory door at the wheel of an automobile a woman—the wife of Grey, the owner of the factory…As Sponge talked, Bruce and the woman in the car, for a moment only, looked into each other's eyes…There had been a look in her eyes as

> though she were about to speak to him, a workman in her husband's factory. He would listen to Sponge. (*Dark* 96-97)

Bruce senses Aline's interest in him but assumes that he must be wrong that a woman of her status would bother to notice "a workman in her husband's factory." Bruce's version of the scene emphasizes the differences in their social positions, but Aline does not appear concerned with this. She does not even identify Bruce as a worker, but rather as a man leaving the factory. Her surprise regarding their connection in that moment stems from the fact that they are strangers, not that he is an employee. Much like Hugh and Clara in *Poor White*, Bruce and Aline feel linked to one another, but through narration of their thoughts, the reader can see that they are not yet in sync with one another regarding how to develop this relationship.

Primarily in the first half of the book focused on Bruce, most chapters feature stream-of-consciousness elements that offer brief glimpses of images or ideas that float around the character's mind. In the opening of Chapter Seven, Bruce considers Sponge Martin's repeatedly told story of the time he stood up to the factory owner and the simplicity of the man's life:

> Maybe there was art in that, the grasping of the real dramatic moment of a life, eh? He shrugged his shoulders—thinking. "Sponge, the sawdust pile, the drinks…Sponge in relation to the town, the Ohio River Valley, sleeping on an old sawdust pile—his relation to the ground beneath him, the stars overhead, the brush in his hand as he painted automobile wheels, the caress in the hand that held the brush, profanity, crudeness—love of an old woman—alive like a fox terrier." (*Dark* 60)

Once he has offered this collection of images to depict Sponge and his lifestyle, Bruce seems to recognize the disjointedness of his thoughts, as the narration notes, "What a floating disconnected thing Bruce felt himself" (*Dark* 60). Bruce shows embarrassment over his inability to express what these observations about Sponge mean and what they say about the character. His frustration with the failure to find meaning brings to mind the frustrations experienced by the narrators from *The Triumph of the Egg* stories and the focal characters in *Winesburg, Ohio*. Although Bruce Dudley interprets his barrage of thoughts as random and unrelated, stream-of-consciousness has often been employed by writers who are most interested in creating realistic narratives. Booth provides explanations from Dorothy Richardson, Robert Humphrey, and James Joyce about the benefits of stream-of-consciousness for getting inside characters' heads and portraying their thought processes (54). In this case, Bruce's observations are part of his attempt to understand Sponge's lifestyle, which Bruce seems to envy, especially for the youthful recklessness displayed in the relationship between Sponge and his wife. The couple frequently will drink the day away or go fishing together suggesting a freedom that Bruce views in stark contrast to his own marriage. The snapshots from Sponge's life represent the little that Bruce really knows about him as well as the vitality of that existence.

A later example of stream-of-consciousness in the novel provides a glimpse into the society of Paris where Aline circulated and highlights the upheaval of social conventions that was taking place: "Men lying, women lying, children lying, being taught to lie. Preachers lying, priests lying, bishops, popes and cardinals lying. Kings lying, governments lying, writers lying, artists drawing lying pictures" (*Dark* 178). This passage appears in a chapter that is mostly paragraphs in similar styles, separated from

one another by extra white space and dividing lines. There is no clarification before or after these words to further explain these thoughts or what inspired them. The stream-of-consciousness technique mimics the frantic, unstable world of rebellion and sexual freedom that young Aline was witnessing.

While stream-of-consciousness aims to express the moods that Anderson desires for each scene, the effect of his sporadic use of poetic lines and songs haphazardly integrated into the narration is not as successful. An introduction to *Dark Laughter* written by Howard Mumford Jones highlights the "radical elements" of this work, emphasizing the narrative aspects: "Anderson, for example, makes no distinction between narrative and meditation, action and description, prose and poetry except occasionally" (6). These elements are certainly radical when compared to the author's previous techniques, but their intentions remain problematic. In some instances, the poetic lines are meant to represent the songs of the African Americans that Bruce Dudley romanticizes. The narrator describes the atmosphere when Bruce first left the city, headed for New Orleans: "Soft Southern nights, warm dusky nights. Shadows flitting at the edge of cotton-fields, in dusky roads by sawmill towns. Soft voices laughing, laughing" (*Dark* 73). Then there is a break in the text, and the next lines are indented to reflect the lyrical form of the words, "Oh, ma banjo dog, / Oh, ho, ma banjo dog" (*Dark* 73). Here the words can easily be interpreted as those of the soft voices that Bruce hears in the distance, presumably African American folk songs. However, Chapter 2 features a more incongruous refrain that lacks any contextual evidence to explain how it applies to the prose narrative. The majority of the chapter details Bruce Dudley's travel throughout the Midwest which brought him to the town of Old Harbor and led to the disposal of his

original name, John Stockton. Right after the point in the tale when Bruce arrives in the new town, there is a break in the narrative for the two lines, "T'witchelty, T'weedlety, T'wadelty, T'wum, / Catch a nigger by the thumb" (*Dark* 15). Immediately, without any explanation or attribution of the words to a specific speaker, the narration switches back to descriptions of the river. A few paragraphs later, the lines reappear in the middle of a comparison between Bruce's journey and that of Huckleberry Finn. The lack of explication for the embedded poetry, in this case, makes the lines stand out as awkward and emphasizes Anderson's failure to replicate the voice of the African American. Townsend lists the many influences who encouraged Sherwood Anderson to "handle the Negro in fiction" including Hart Crane, Jean Toomer, and the readers who made *Dark Laughter* a commercial success (225-226). However, as Townsend points out, Anderson never stumbled upon anything new or authentic in his portrayal of African Americans: "All the clichés emerged" (225). Bruce Dudley's complaints about misused artistic techniques return to mind when one notes the failure of Anderson's attempts to radicalize his style and reflect the influence of modern trailblazers like Joyce.

Conclusion

A chronological study of Sherwood Anderson's fictional works that includes both novels and short stories reveals a progression in regards to his experimentation with narrational choices regarding frames and techniques as well as an awareness of the potential for exploiting the relationship between the meaning of the story itself and the way that it is told. In each text, he tries a different narrative method to reflect what the characters are experiencing, usually some form of alienation or confusion in their attempts to build relationships with one another. The focal characters and narrators struggle with their abilities to understand and relate the story of another person's life. The narration in *Winesburg, Ohio* doubts its own effectiveness by calling for the help of a poet while the "grotesques" know that they cannot pass along their own stories in the same way that George Willard can. *Poor White* portrays two characters in particular who cannot understand one another and would benefit from sharing the narration's access to the other individual's thoughts. The short story "I Want to Know Why" centers around the narrator's dire need to make sense of another man's actions and expects narration to somehow make that possible. Bruce, as one of the main focal characters in *Dark Laughter*, desperately wants to understand Sponge Martin's lifestyle and the stream-of-consciousness narration portrays Bruce's thought process as he tries to identify exactly what it is about Sponge's life that he admires and wants to emulate.

While Anderson's fictional narratives address the complexity involved in interpreting the stories of others and announce the possibility for failure, Anderson seemed to find an effective narrational tool to avoid such risks in his non-fiction. I want to briefly explore aspects of Anderson's journalistic writing as discussed in Walter B.

Rideout's 1959 article "Why Sherwood Anderson Employed Buck Fever." The title refers to the fictional reporter that Anderson created while serving as editor for two rural Virginia county newspapers in 1927. This places his foray into small town journalism just two years after the release of his best-seller, *Dark Laughter*, a fact that distinguishes Anderson as "the only important writer in American literary history to abandon writing professionally for editing and publishing obscure rural weekly newspapers" (White 14). Anderson experimented with journalism as an escape from the pressure to produce new fiction, and as Rideout notes, his aims for the newspapers were quite similar to his ideals for fiction:

> But he did have a few notions of policy, those one might expect from the author of *Winesburg, Ohio* turned country editor. According to published statements in early issues of both newspapers, what Anderson most clearly wanted was that the *News* and the *Democrat* "give expression to...all of the everyday life of a very typical American community." The papers were to be "intensely local." ("Why Sherwood" 130)

One detail that could have sabotaged Anderson's quest for local authenticity was the fact that he himself was not a local, at least in the sense of being a native. The depiction of small-town life found in *Winesburg, Ohio* was often praised for its realism and the fact that the village reflected the dynamics of rural communities in all parts of the country. While Anderson may have been well-versed in the notion of the small town in a general sense, he was not as familiar with the specifics of the community of Marion, Virginia. He could certainly find parallels between his own experiences in Ohio and life in Marion as typical of the rural community, but his emphasis on the local element in the newspaper

proves that he also appreciated the specific differences that made the Virginia town unique.

The editor found a way to superficially circumvent this problem by inventing the persona of Buck Fever, a reporter hailing from the nearby mountains who is frequently badgered by his parents to return to his home in "Coon Hollow." Anderson included letters from Buck's father and mother, named Paw and Malaria Fever, respectively, that were written in exaggerated dialect, but Buck himself was never portrayed as a hillbilly caricature. The character was primarily used "as a shrewdly humorous reporter of and commentator on current events in Marion and Smyth County" ("Why Sherwood" 133). Buck Fever, with his familiar homespun vernacular, could tease the locals and point out the absurdities he notices in town in a way that an outsider like Anderson could not.

By creating the character of Buck Fever, Anderson finds a way to tell the stories and make the observations about Marion that he wants through a narrational voice that will connect with his readers rather than alienating or offending them with his sometimes judgmental critiques of small-town life. In order to capture the "intensely local" flair that he desired, the author imagined a reporter and storyteller who could serve this purpose. Rideout also reveals that the persona of Buck provided a psychological escape for Anderson himself. The small-town living which Anderson was drawn to and wrote about frequently presented a complicated problem for the author: "Essentially he was living a paradox. As a lover of small towns and of human beings, Anderson desired community; as an intensely individualistic artist, one, moreover, who had dared break with many conventions, he rebelled against community" ("Why Sherwood" 135). The character of Buck offered a buffer through whom Anderson could filter his inclinations to question

and challenge the aspects of community that displeased him while still maintaining a familiar, friendly image.

Anderson feels like he can tap into the local through this character and connect with the readers, yet the narrators and characters in his fiction that come from the same place and are both locals can never seem to understand one another; Anderson displays a greater belief in the power of narration than he allows to his fictional characters. He also does not attempt to draw the reader's attention to his choices in the journalistic writing. There is conflicting information regarding whether or not the readers believed Buck to be a real person. Whether the locals realized Buck's true identity or not, Rideout does not mention Anderson offering any hints within the newspaper or inviting readers to question the reporter's effectiveness like he does with fictional narrators. In order to make his opinions known, Anderson abandons his techniques for narrational ambiguity, wanting the newspaper readers to accept Buck's observations whole-heartedly.

If Anderson's problems with the concept of community were to be expressed in his own voice, the people of Marion would probably not have appreciated the successful author from Chicago critiquing their way of life. However, he knew how to soften the blow of his observations by making the voice expressing these thoughts a recognizably local one. Once again, Anderson proves his awareness of the need to make thoughtful narrational choices that fit Wayne Booth's criteria of the what and how of storytelling; in order to communicate the depiction of Marion that he wants to focus on, Anderson manipulates his readers through narrational tactics intended to draw them in. Although his methods in non-fiction are practically oppositional to his choices made in working with fiction, Anderson's awareness of the need to switch tactics for the genre of

journalism coincides with the change in narrational style noted in *Dark Laughter*. In the novel, the author altered his style to appeal to readers attracted to the emerging methods and concepts of Modernism, but this change in his fiction was ineffective, despite its initial commercial success, because it abandoned the notion of complications in narrative that had made Anderson's storytelling unique.

The study of narrative devices in Sherwood Anderson's fictional writing provides an opportunity for further scholarship that examines a wider range of the author's work while also considering elements beyond theme and subject. *Winesburg, Ohio* and selections from it, such as "Hands" and "The Book of the Grotesque," along with the short stories including "I Want to Know Why" and "Death in the Woods" continue to be discussed in American literature courses, but they should be understood in relation to the greater context of Anderson's works and with attention paid to more than just content. Ann Charters' anthology *The American Short Story and Its Writer* from 2000 is typical of the collections that deliver Anderson's work to such literary classes. Charters' book includes "Hands" with an introduction describing Anderson's career and his style, saying, "In an understated fashion, he wove carefully selected realistic details into a narrative that moves by apparently formless associations of thought and feeling but is actually a controlled progression of fully dramatized situations" (587). The emphasis once again is on Anderson's realism. Although this description does mention the concept of narrative, it provides little detail of the exact methods of perspective that Anderson uses in order to achieve his realistic tone. Consideration of a wider range of Anderson's works reveals a shift in his own methods towards increasingly elaborate modes of narration that alternate between an increasing number of focal characters and incorporate various embedded

narratives within the main story. Although these methods seem to become more complicated over time, their primary function is still to explore the relationships between characters and their desperate attempts to understand one another as a means of better understanding themselves. The frame at the beginning of *Winesburg, Ohio* remains open-ended, but the uncertainty that this creates regarding the identity of the narrator and the sincerity of the concept of the grotesque challenges the reader to see the conflict that can exist between seemingly simple Midwestern people, caused by the inability to fully access another individual's truth . The constant shifts in *Poor White's* focalization serve to accentuate the differences in perception and the sense of isolation that separates a man and woman trying to connect while Anderson's short stories focus on a single, first-person perspective that champions but also challenges the power of the narrative for personal growth. *Dark Laughter* features the most significant change in Anderson's narration as the author experiments with stream-of-consciousness and embedding song lyrics into the prose to represent the supposedly more emotionally expressive voices of African Americans that seem to haunt the white characters. The barrage of seemingly disconnected voices does reflect the uncertainty inherent in the relationships as well as the sense of sexual freedom in the novel, but many readers and critics were so disturbed by Anderson's sudden change in style and imitation of popular modern narration techniques that these methods became ineffective. Each of these choices reflects Anderson's consciousness of his own authorial power and the possibilities of relinquishing that power in a way that allows readers to consider the result of such power. By exploring these technical aspects of Sherwood Anderson's writing, scholars have a greater possibility of understanding his impact on future writers and the evolution of

American literature during the modern period. A more thorough knowledge of Anderson allows for more detailed analysis of Hemingway's career from Anderson's direct influence in the early short stories "My Old Man" to Hemingway's satirical response to *Dark Laughter* in his *The Torrents of Spring*. The attention to narrational choices and the complexity of Anderson's decisions can also be seen as a base for William Faulkner's experimentation with point of view and embedded narratives in *The Sound and The Fury* and *A Light in August*. In fact, Faulkner appears to have modeled the creation of his Yoknapatawpha County off of Anderson's community of Winesburg; Faulkner even dedicated the first appearance of his elaborate fictional setting to Anderson (Phillips 209). Just as Sherwood Anderson's writings served as an influential spring board for these two giants of the modern period in the creation of their works, study of Anderson's career and the particulars of his literary effectiveness can serve as a starting point in the analysis of works by these authors and many others of the same era in terms of particular trends of American modernism and how they were developed or improved from Anderson's example.

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